

LIVING INTO BIBLICAL COMMUNITY  
THROUGH HEALTHY CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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## CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	v
ABSTRACT	vi
CHAPTER ONE. THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING	1
The World Longs for Community	1
The Church Longs for Community	4
Embracing Biblical Identity in Real Time	8
CHAPTER TWO. BIBLICAL & THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS	12
What is Community?	12
What is Biblical Community?	12
The Call to Community – The Nation of Israel	17
The Culmination of Community – The Metaphors of the Body of Christ and Family of God	20
The Character of Community – God's Instructions for the Body	25
CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW	37
Historical Christian Communities in Spiritual Renewal	38
Contemporary Interest in Community	51
A Systemic Understanding of Community Dynamics	61
Addressing Conflict in the Family of God	70
CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH PROJECT — LESSONS FROM INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES	81
The Communities	82
The Questions and Interviews	83

Synthesizing Strengths	146
Summary	159
CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS	161
Restatement of the Need	161
The Resource: Christian Community	164
The Pathway: Conflict Strategies	167
The Fruit: Inheritance and Witness	178
Further Implications and Research	179
APPENDIX A	183
APPENDIX B	186
APPENDIX C	187
APPENDIX D	188
APPENDIX E	191
APPENDIX F	193
APPENDIX G	197
BIBLIOGRAPHY	199
VITA	205

## FIGURES

3-1	The Slippery Slope	72
4-1	The Intentionality Scale	97
4-2	The Intentionality Scale	149
5-1	The Intentionality Scale	170
5-2	Systems Concepts Chart	172-177

## ABSTRACT

God designed people to live in community with one another to reflect his nature and to be witnesses to His love and redemptive power. Because of mankind's basic selfishness as well as the increase of technology and pace of modern life, believers are often drawn away from the depth and quality of close fellowship, or *koinonia*, that God intended for his family. As a result Christians can become as spiritually and relationally impoverished as the world around us.

Throughout history, believing men and women have sought to disengage from the distractions of surrounding culture by moving into intentional Christian communities seeking to more fully experience and live out the gospel in the rhythm of their daily lives. From early monasticism to our 21<sup>st</sup> century "new monasticism" much can be learned from them. Through a series of interviews this paper seeks to discover what may be learned from those currently living in intentional Christian community and to offer lessons to the church.

Since living in community involves living with fellow fallen human beings, we often end up being our own greatest hindrance to the apprehension of mutual spiritual aspirations. The most significant and unanticipated lesson learned from the communities interviewed, therefore, was the critical role that an unwavering commitment to face and deal with interpersonal conflict plays in the pursuit of genuine *koinonia*. With the help of biblical principles of peacemaking as well as insights from systems theory, this paper offers a paradigm and pathway for church leaders to live more intentionally into authentic biblical community through healthy conflict resolution.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

### The World Longs for Community

Throughout most of human history people have lived in close proximity to one another in villages, towns and even small cities. Lives have been naturally intertwined with others in business, family and leisure. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, followed by modern transportation and technology, however, people in North American society have become separated from one another in distance and in intimacy. While having been afforded greater mobility and a spectrum of options through modernization, the quality and longevity of relationships have become truncated. While imaginations and horizons have been expanded and individualism has been elevated, the fallout of divorce, broken families and existential despair have come to increasingly characterize life in our society. The sense of rootedness and belonging to people and places—which those in previous times and generations took for granted—is being rapidly lost. Theologian and author Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove describes our current society in this way: “Like children stumbling off a merry-go-round, Americans are grasping for something to anchor our lives in a sea of constant change.”<sup>1</sup> He continues, “...Everything in this world tries to pull us away from community, pushes us to choose ourselves over others, to choose independence over interdependence, to choose great things over small things, to choose going fast alone over going far together.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Wisdom of Stability* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson-Hartgrove, *Wisdom of Stability*, 135.

In their classic book, *The Family*, Jack and Judy Balwick discuss what they call the crisis and challenge of modernity. Crises are reflected in the disintegration of “traditional forms” of values, behaviors and expectations for relationships and family life. One of three major modern day crises they identify is that of a crisis of *community*, the result of increased mobility and frequent broken homes resulting in lack of social control and meaningful intimacy.<sup>3</sup> Whereas close community ties are essential for personal, emotional, social and spiritual well-being, there is spiritual adversity and shipwreck awaiting those who capitulate to the warped priorities and allegiances of people who pursue the American Dream in our culture. A sense of community is indeed one of the greatest losses people experience. An article in USA Today references a comparative study in *American Sociological Review* where in 1985, the average American was determined to have three people in whom to confide matters that were important to them. In 2004, that number dropped to two, with one in four reporting to have no close confidants at all.<sup>4</sup>

In the last two decades the growth and mainstreaming of Postmodernism and Postmodern thought in North American society has continued to foster and intensify these negative effects on human relationships. Philosophical and moral relativism which characterize postmodern thought—while being lauded by those who desire to escape the strict materialism and rationalism of modernism—have also served to psychologically set people further apart from one another socially

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<sup>3</sup> Jack O. Balwick and Judy E. Balwick, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 282.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas A. Hall, Judy Hall and Steve Daman, *The Cat and The Toaster: Living System Ministry in a Technological Age* (Eugene Oregon: Wipf & Stock Urban Voice Series, 2010), 300.

and emotionally. As people have enjoyed the intellectual, psychological and moral “freedom” afforded by the letting go of determinism and the belief in absolutes, it is this very surrendering of absolutes and constraints which forebode eventual personal and societal collapse.

In a day and age when everyone from nations to families are fracturing,<sup>5</sup> there still remains the human need and drive for closeness, identification and camaraderie. With little grounding in shared values and absolutes, however, there is little depth of agreement or identity for postmoderns to base their commitments and relationships on. Gene Veith in his book *Postmodern Times* states that as the assumptions that shaped 21<sup>st</sup> century thought have “exploded,” one effect is that of society segmenting itself into antagonistic groups.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the negative social effects of people doing “what [is] right in [their] own eyes”<sup>7</sup> is significant.

Yet in the midst of the relational vacuum that modern and postmodern society bring, human beings still need to express their natural drive and need for community. Increasingly people in our society have respond by banding together to find support and a sense of community. Physical co-housing communities as well as virtual or conceptual communities are being formed, centering individuals around such things as common interests, needs, causes, affinities, avocations, education, training, language, fetishes, physical characteristics, behaviors or belief. Widely divergent groups or “communities” now abound and vie for people’s allegiance—self-defined communities such as the GLBTQ community,

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<sup>5</sup> An over 50% divorce rate in the US is one strong indicator of this.

<sup>6</sup> Gene Edward Veith, *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), xi.

<sup>7</sup> Judges 17:6; 21:25 (NASB).

the law enforcement community, the medical marijuana community, the gaming community, the Islamic community, the animal rights community, the Pro Sports community, and so on — with each of them offering their own version of belongingness, identity and purpose.

Yet, none of these are deeply rooted or immutable; none of them are absolute or all-encompassing; none of them account for the fullness of any one human being; and none of them promise to anchor anyone beyond surface aspects of life. People in our society still suffer from feelings of rootlessness and loneliness and share a longing to belong, to have a sense of peace and of purpose.

### The Church Longs for Community

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *Life Together* compares human, natural community with Christian community identifying them as ontologically different from one another. He sees human community as deriving from the natural urges, powers and capacities of the human spirit, while in contrast, Christian community's fundamental nature is a propositional, spiritual reality—in Christ and based on absolute truth.<sup>8</sup> In actuality, fallen human community restricts the very freedom that postmodernism seeks to offer because with its strong affections it pushes toward sameness. As a result, the global village that a postmodern world offers is more of a Potemkin Village<sup>9</sup> — one which in actuality fosters growing isolation behind the façade.

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<sup>8</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1954), 31.

<sup>9</sup> The story of Russian military leader, Grigory Potemkin, who, in an effort to impress (and fool) Catherine the Great with the value of her new conquests in Crimea, constructed hollow facades of villages along the Dnieper River for her to view on her tour of the area.



Christian community is not immune to this phenomenon. The church, too, can offer a theology of closeness and mutual identification, yet actual relationships can still function the same way as in the larger society—surface relationships with shallow commitments.

The problem of a lack of genuine and realized Christian community is exacerbated by a factor often more appreciated for its strength than for its weakness: large churches drawing from a wide radius. Whereas in former times churches served only their local parishes or nearby town, in modern North America mega churches appeal to many—for both good and perhaps not-so-good reasons. It is not unusual for attendees to drive many miles and up to an hour one way to attend church. Though people may worship at the same church, they simply live too far away from one another to have the time or opportunity to relate meaningfully together beyond saying hello on a Sunday morning or at best sitting in the same Sunday School class. The concept of the local parish is a relic of the past. Now it is not unusual for people to travel twenty or thirty miles or more to attend church, and so people are much less likely to take part in or advantage of other church activities and ministries than if they lived in the immediate area. As a result, we often lack the kind of close, committed Christian community intended to support, nurture and sustain our spiritual focus and priorities, encouraging and inspiring our love and service to God. As Eugene Peterson says in his introduction to Larry Crabb's book, *The Safest Place on Earth*, "We are good at forming clubs or gathering crowds, but they're not communities. The formation of community is the intricate, painful work of the Holy

Spirit. We can't buy or make it, we can only offer ourselves to become community."<sup>10</sup>

For Christians life in our modern communities also often involves succumbing to the same societal pressure as the world. For us, this societal pull may not be so much a challenge to directly embrace postmodern philosophical ideologies as much as it may be to passively submit to the lure of the American Dream—which asks us to sacrifice our time, attention and relationships to pursue the god of material gain. We buy into the drive to accomplish—to be upwardly mobile or to make sure our children succeed by participating in every activity possible. It is the water we swim in. Our culture makes demands on our time, energies and allegiances to a degree that is unmatched in modern history. The pace of life as well as the demands to pursue non-biblical values and priorities threatens to overshadow the kinds of priorities, commitments and allegiances that scripture calls us to have. One could say that the pursuit of the values of all of the other “communities” around us can keep us from experiencing the fullness and reality of the one Community that truly defines us.

Hence, the Christian community is often not in any healthier relational condition than the culture around us. Although called to live in counter-cultural ways, today's followers of Christ are subject to the ever-amplifying siren-like call to adopt the values and priorities of the world and culture around us. Idols such as consumerism, hedonism and individualism threaten to take a Christian's time, energy and affection away from loving and serving the Lord and experiencing His rest. While most North American Christians believe that our greatest identity and

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<sup>10</sup> Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1997), viii.

affinity is with fellow believers in Body of Christ, when it comes to sharing a sense of belongingness, community and depth of relationship our actual experience of this reality is often quite different.

Enuma Okoro, a young, contemporary Christian writer speaks of her search for community as a postmodern Christian in her book *Reluctant Pilgrim: A Moody, Somewhat Self-Indulgent Introvert's Search for Spiritual Community*. She describes her search as a "rocky, on-again, mostly off-again love affair with the idea of church, and the painful process of learning that the church and community are often not synonymous."<sup>11</sup> Reflecting the individualism of this age she says that no one ever told her that church community was important and that "crossing the threshold into new life with God had anything to do with anyone else but me."<sup>12</sup> Explaining her deeper desires for her experience in the church, she says, "I want to find a church that teaches me something about carrying each other's burdens, about living into the gift of God's grace so that we are free to be the persons and community God calls us to be."<sup>13</sup>

Christians were created for and called to live in community together in relationships which are designed to be far more deep, broad and profound (Eph 2:19-22; 4:15-16). As believers we are called out and declared by God to be members of a unique, eternal and unbreakable family, one that is connected not merely by mutual interests but by covenant relationship with God and one another. We are intended to experience depth, quality and an authenticity in

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<sup>11</sup> Enuma Okoro, *Reluctant Pilgrim: A Moody, Somewhat Self-Indulgent Introvert's Search for Spiritual Community* (Nashville, TN: Fresh Air Book/Upper Room Books, 2010), 23.

<sup>12</sup> Okoro, *Reluctant Pilgrim*, 44.

<sup>13</sup> Okoro, *Reluctant Pilgrim*, 80.

relationship to one another which goes far beyond anything the world can offer (Acts 2:42-47).

The continuing challenge facing our churches, therefore, is to better learn to cultivate and live into the authentic community life that we are designed and called by God to experience.

### Embracing Biblical Identity in Real Time

The challenge and struggle to learn to overcome and transcend the values of our surrounding culture and to grow into authentic Christian community is by no means limited to believers in our postmodern day and age. In different times and places throughout church history believers have sought to cultivate and realize a fuller experience of their reconciled relationship with God and with one another, as part of answering Jesus' call with efforts to live out more fully the first and second Great Commandments (Matt 22:34-30). Over the centuries of Christian history individuals and groups of earnest believers have formed intentional communities for mutual worship, contemplation and mission. The most enduring and well-known of these kinds of communities are the monastic communities. From their beginnings during the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., followed by the Benedictines, Carthusians, Cistercians, Franciscans and Jesuits, monastic communities have continued into this day. Since the Reformation, Protestants such as the Moravians, Methodists and others have also banded together in community seeking to realize these aims. The fruit of these monastic movements have often that of renewal and revival within the church and reformation in society.

In the final few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in America, an increasing number of churches have sought to cultivate relationships and biblical community through cell or small group ministries. William Beckham in his book *The Second Reformation* believes that the church is in the midst of a new, small group revolution.<sup>14</sup> While the concept of developing communities of small groups is by no means a new one, it appears that this development has been accelerated and expanded in reaction to the fragmentation of contemporary, postmodern life. That is coupled with a renewed recognition of God's call in scripture to committed, supportive relationships in the Body of Christ.

Beginning around the time of the Jesus Movement in the 1970s and following, there has been a growing movement among Christians to co-house together in intentional communities to seek to live out their Christian lives in deeper and more sustained and committed way—drawing on the value of *stability* embraced by monastic communities in history. 2004 is considered to be the year where a new movement in the United States called *New Monasticism* became identified and inaugurated, the term having been first having been developed by Jonathan Wilson in his 1997 book *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World*.<sup>15</sup> Moving beyond a commitment to gather in weekly small groups together, new monastics are groups of Christians choosing to live together in intentional communities, seeking to live out the gospel together through shared worship and lives. Often they have been those who have moved into poor,

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<sup>14</sup> William, Beckham, *The Second Reformation: Reshaping the Church for the Twenty-First Century* (Houston, TX: Touch Publications, 1997), 67.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan R. Wilson, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: Lessons for the Church from MacIntyre's After Virtue* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1997).

underserved neighborhoods and there together seek to pursue the most authentic experience of God, mission and unity in Christ they can. Accounts of these various communities speak of powerful spiritual renewal taking place in the lives of community members, as well as significant witness and outreach to the community, helping transform neighborhoods, cities, and the wider society.

There are significant things that can be learned from sisters and brothers in Christ who have taken this “radical” step to live in community in our Postmodern day. This paper seeks to ask and answer the question of what the church can learn from them, with the aim of gleaning principles which can help others in the Body of Christ to move closer to and more fully apprehend authentic Christian community. Christians living in intentional community are by no means the only believers who ever have or ever can apprehend a fuller a sense of community as the Body of Christ, but in our up-for-grabs world there is still much that the church at large may be able to learn from our brothers and sisters who have chosen to live this way in our postmodern context.

While most of us can or will not choose to live in co-housed, intentional Christian communities we can look to discern successful principles and practices which can inform and be transferable to those us of living life together in the typical far-flung congregations of the North American church. As we desire to further inculcate a culture of Christian community within our congregations, those living in intentional community can help us identify and prepare to face and work through the various challenges that will come in our pursuit of getting closer to

God and one another, as we seek to more faithfully and fully live out the gospel in community and in society.

## CHAPTER TWO: BIBLICAL & THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

### What is Community?

Random House Webster's Dictionary defines the noun community as "a social, religious, occupational, or other group sharing common characteristics or interests and perceived or perceiving itself as distinct in some respect from the larger society within which it exists (usually preceded by *the*): *the business community; the community of scholars*"<sup>1</sup> etcetera. In our society, then, when one considers themselves to be a part of a given community it is because they identify and define themselves by a particular interest, activity or belief they have in common with others who also define themselves in that way. Accompanying this is a perception and hope, that in our ever-fracturing and isolating society, by identifying with a given community or communities, individuals will be able to find and experience a root sense of belonging, value and purpose.

### What is Biblical Community?

We begin with the concept and definition of community. When we speak of community in contemporary society what first comes to mind is the noun, also defined by Random House Webster's as "a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government, and often have a common cultural and historical heritage," as well as the "locality inhabited by such a group." When Christians speak of "experiencing community" together (adverb modifying a noun) they are most often referring to the quality and

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<sup>1</sup> "Community." Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/community> (accessed: April 01, 2012).



closeness of relationships experienced by the sharing of lives within such communities. This may be physically on a day to day basis, virtually, by means of Internet communities and communication, or conceptually, describing the feeling of solidarity with dispersed others who share the same beliefs, commitments and lifestyle.

In the Old Testament the most common word translated as “community” is the noun ,קהל or *q’hal*, meaning assembly, company or congregation.<sup>2</sup> In the New Testament the noun translated as “community” is found once, in Acts 25:24 (and only in the New International Version) as πληθος or *playthos* meaning a quantity or number, multitude, crowd of people, throng, assembly—or a technical term for the whole body of a church’s members.<sup>3</sup> While these words certainly denote the *physicality* of the word community, they fall short of describing the *experience* of community which is of greatest interest in this paper.

### *Koinonia*

In Greek the word for fellowship is the noun κοινωνία or *koinonia*.<sup>4</sup> The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia defines this as “communion” or “fellowship,” meaning “the association of believers in the experience of their common salvation, or in the various consequences, expressions, and benefits of

<sup>2</sup> Harris R. Laird, Gleason L. Archer, Jr. and Bruce K. Watke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Volume 2 (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1980), 789.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 447.

salvation.”<sup>5</sup> This word comes closest to the meaning and usage of the word “community” that we are seeking for in this paper—as well as that of which we speak (and seek) in our North American Christian culture.

Richard Valantisis in his book, *The Gospels and Christian Life in History* describes a “koinonia community” as signifying a strong solidarity and agreement between members. It connotes extremely intimate relationships as companions, partners and friends, and maintains a high degree of honor toward all involved. This was epitomized by Paul and his efforts through his missionary travels to unite churches in mutual love and support. Valantisis emphasizes that *koinonia* in the ancient world was very serious business, and that one finds a sense of true community depending on the *koinonia* that they share.<sup>6</sup>

Probably the most commonly cited scripture involving *koinonia* is Acts 2:42-47:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Charles Swindoll in his study of *koinonia* points to the root word *koinos*, meaning common or communal. He delineates four relational activities that

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<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Editor, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 752.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Valantisis, Douglas K. Bley and Dennis C. Haugh, *The Gospels and Christian Life in History and Practice* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 231-232.

comprise *koinonia* from these verses—teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer—noting that they involve a sharing *of* things (everything in common, properties, possessions) and a sharing *in* things (fellowship, prayer).<sup>7</sup> Qualities of *koinonia* include love, humility, restoration, forgiveness, encouragement and the Word of God.<sup>8</sup>

Elsewhere in the New Testament *koinonia* is used to describe the relationship that believers have with various individuals and people: Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:9), the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14), between believers (Gal 2:9), in Christ's sufferings (Phil 3:10), in the faith (Phlm1:6), and with believers, the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3, 6, 7). Paul writes his letters to the churches in very intimate and tender terms, pleading passionately with them regarding his concern for them and their various issues, and greeting all, both individuals and churches as a father and brother. Clearly fellowship or community is meant to be deep, intimate and shared between believers, and between believers and the Godhead, as taught and illustrated throughout the New Testament.

### *The Community of the Godhead*

The idea of community is grounded in the nature of the Godhead. In the creation narrative (Gen 1:26) God said "Let us make mankind in *our* image, in *our* likeness..." (emphasis added) indicating a plurality of God. God also declared in Genesis 2:18 that as creatures made in His image that "It is not good for the man to be alone" highlighting the importance of community.

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Swindoll, *Koinonia: A Recipe for Authentic Fellowship*. (Anaheim, CA: Insight for Living, 1995), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Swindoll, *Koinonia*, 5.

In John 1:1-3 the apostle John evidences the nature of Jesus Christ where he states “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made...” This is reinforced again in verse 10 where John says that the world was made through Jesus Christ, indicating the eternality as well as the plurality of the Godhead, as Jesus and God are seen to be one in nature and in communion from and for all time.

More light is shone on the quality of the relationships within the Godhead by Jesus in John 17 when he prays for those who believe in him. “Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one *as we are one*. (John 17:11b, emphasis added). In verses 20 and 22 Jesus says, “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, *just as you are in me and I am in you*. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be *one as we are one*—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity” (emphasis added). It is God’s desire that while His children may not share in His divinity, He does want them to be able to share in the love and unity that He and the Father have eternally enjoyed in the Godhead.

The apostle Paul also understood the nature and unity of the Godhead as he prayed in 2 Corinthians 13:14, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” It is God’s intention that His children share in the qualities that characterize the relationships that He Himself enjoys within Himself—one of love, honor and mutual

glorification. The quality of our unity in the *community* of believers is intended to reflect the quality of God's own unity. The Godhead has enjoyed perfect love and harmony, and God created—and redeemed—mankind to share it with Him.

### The Call to Community – The Nation of Israel

Although God created mankind to share in community with Himself and with one another, mankind's fall into sin had serious repercussions. Beginning in Genesis 4 the Bible records how things began to go awry with God's original design. Kenneth Gangel in his essay *Toward a Biblical Theology of Marriage and Family*<sup>9</sup> notes in the Pentateuch and historical books how people distorted God's original intention for familial—and all—relationships through sin. While the Law outlined proper familial and relational roles, of special note are the many negative accounts of how people treated one another in relationships. Sin destroyed the harmony in the husband-wife relationship (e.g. Adam's blaming of Eve in Genesis 3, the vacuum of love for Leah by Jacob, adultery of David and the polygamy of Solomon); parent-child relationships (e.g. Isaac and Rebekah's inequality of love for their children, Cain and Esau's rebellion); parent-teen relationships (e.g. David's children's sexual deviation and murder); sibling-sibling relationships (e.g. enmity between Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau); family-God relationships (parents failing to teach their children the way of the Lord—to be in right relationship with God); family-society relationships (e.g. murder of the Shechemites); and family-church relationships (bad behavior and strife

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<sup>9</sup> Gangel, Kenneth. 1977. "Toward a Biblical Theology of Marriage and Family", *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 5: 55-69.

addressed by Paul in many of his epistles). Sin mars and destroys the harmony and fellowship—the community—that God intended mankind to have.

Nevertheless, through the history of the nation of Israel God demonstrated His continual desire to call people into a new and renewed relationship with Him—one of love and faithfulness. In Deuteronomy 7:6-8a God says to the Israelites,

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery...

Beginning with Abraham, God had a plan to show His character and call to mankind through a people—the nation of Israel. In His call to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 He said that He would make Abraham and his offspring into a great nation, “and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” This call was reaffirmed in Genesis 17:3-7 and in 18:18-19, “Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”

As to the nature of the relationship Abraham was called God's "friend" according to 2 Chronicles 20:7 and Isaiah 41:8. In the New Testament James affirms in 2:23: "And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend."

After Abraham passed God's test of faithfulness and was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac, God reaffirmed His promise by saying, "...I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me" (Gen 22:15-18). This promise was also reaffirmed to Abraham's son Isaac in Genesis 26:23-24 and his grandson, Jacob in Genesis 26:4; 28:14.

Finally, God confirmed His special relationship to the nation of Israel through Moses. In Deuteronomy 7:6-8a, He said

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, *his treasured possession*. The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because *the Lord loved you* and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you... (emphasis added).

The people of Israel were called God's chosen people, His treasured possession—terms of true intimacy, love and endearment. That all of the nations of the earth were to be blessed through them also indicates that there was something about the *nature and quality* of their relationship to God and one another that was meant to be attractive and enriching to other peoples.

## The Culmination of Community – the Metaphors of the Body of Christ and Family of God.

In the New Testament God reveals His continuing desire to be in community with His people—and them with each other. The curse of the Fall was broken through the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross (Gal 3:13)<sup>10</sup>, and justification and redemption was provided for all mankind (Rom 4:25<sup>11</sup>; Col 1:14<sup>12</sup>). The way was made for us to be reconciled with God (2 Cor 5:18)<sup>13</sup> and as a result to ourselves and with one another (Col 3:13).<sup>14</sup> Now, as His new creation (2 Cor 5:17<sup>15</sup> and Gal 6:15<sup>16</sup>) we become members of a new community, the redeemed people of God (1 Pet 2:10).<sup>17</sup>

The scriptures use various metaphors to describe the new relationship that believers have with God through Christ. Paul speaks of believers as part of God's temple (1 Cor 3:16-17<sup>18</sup>; Eph 2:19-22<sup>19</sup>) and Peter describes them as "living stones" which are "being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"

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<sup>10</sup> "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."

<sup>11</sup> "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."

<sup>12</sup> "...in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

<sup>13</sup> "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."

<sup>14</sup> "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

<sup>15</sup> "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"

<sup>16</sup> "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation."

<sup>17</sup> "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

<sup>18</sup> "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple."

<sup>19</sup> "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."



(1 Pt 2:5). Jesus himself paints probably the most intimate picture of believers' relationship to him by describing himself as a bridegroom (Matt 9:14-15a)<sup>20</sup> and believers as his bride (Rev 21:2).<sup>21</sup>

When it comes to describing relationships between believers, probably the most descriptive and functional metaphors used in scripture are those of the Body of Christ and the Family of God. These metaphors are most helpful in illustrating for us the way believers are meant to relate and work together as they live out their identity and calling.

### *The Body of Christ.*

In Ephesians 1:22-23 Paul speaks of the church as being Christ's body by saying "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for *the church, which is his body*, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (emphasis added). In discussing spiritual gifts and their use Paul further uses the body metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12:12-14<sup>22</sup> followed by a wonderful explanation of the attitude that each part should have of itself and for one another in verses 15-26. In verse 27 he concludes, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

There is nothing in the human body that acts in isolation. All systems and functions are interconnected and reliant on one another. As Paul says in verse

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<sup>20</sup> "Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them?"

<sup>21</sup> "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband."

<sup>22</sup> "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many."

21, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!'" Mutual support, encouragement and submission are essential for the body to function, to be healthy, and to accomplish its purpose. Just as the parts of the body are organically interconnected, so are all believers to Christ and to one another.

### *The Family of God.*

Paul uses this metaphor in Ephesians 2:19-22 where he says "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also *members of his household...*" To the Thessalonians he refers to fellow believers as "God's family" (1 Thes 4:10) and to his protégé, Timothy, he likens the proper care of the church to the proper care of a family (1 Tim 3:5). In 1 Peter 2:17 Peter admonishes his readers to, among other things, "Show proper respect to everyone [and] love the family of believers..."

In his aforementioned article Kenneth Gangel describes the church as the "Family of Families." As the assembled and corporate children of God our identification as such in the church stresses that we give God's family our highest allegiance and in it find our deepest identity and purpose. Gangel lists values in the family which God has designed that are intended to hold believers together, and by which we must nurture our life together in the church. They include monogamy, fidelity, chastity, nurture, unity and equality.<sup>23</sup> These qualities are of timeless value and are as counter-cultural today as they were when they were written.

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<sup>23</sup> Gangel, *Toward a Biblical Theology of Marriage and Family*, 318-331.

Gangel identifies twenty-two similes and metaphors in the epistles and Revelation—both positive and negative—which teach through family analogies.<sup>24</sup>

Jesus is the son of the Father.	Rom 1:3, 4, 9; 5:10; 1 Cor 15:24; Gal 1:15; 4:4-6; Heb 1:5; 3:6; 1John 2:22-23; 5:20-21; 2 John 3; Rev 2:27; 14:1
Christ is the husband of the church, the virgin bride.	2 Cor 11:2; Rev 21:9, 22:17
Christ is the First-born.	Col 1:15
God is our father.	Rom 1:7, 8:14-17, 21, 9:8-9; 1 Cor 1:3, 8:6; Gal 1:1-4; Eph 4:6; 1 Pet 1:17; Rev 21:7
We are God's sons.	Galatians 3:26, 4:1-7; Ephesians 1:5; 1 John 3:1,2,10, 5:19
We are heirs of God our father.	Rom 8:17; Gal 4:1-7
Christians are brothers (siblings).	1 Cor 7:24; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 4:28; Phlm 16; 1 John 2:10; 3 John 3; Rev 19:10
Salvation is a new birth.	James 1:17,18; 1John 3:9, 5:1, 18
New Christians are like babies.	1 Cor 3:1; Eph 4:13; Heb 5:13
Believers are like children.	Eph 5:1; Phil 2:15; Heb 2:13; 1 Pet 1:14; 1 John 2:1,14,18, 3:7; 2 John 4
Believers are a family.	Ephesians 3:5; 1 Timothy 5:1-2; Hebrews 2:11
The local church is like a lady with children.	2 John 1:14
Older believers are like fathers.	1 John 2:13
Christ is like a husband.	Eph 5:25
Paul is a father of those he led to Christ.	1 Cor 4:15; 2 Cor 6:13; Phil 2:22; 1 Thess 2:11; Phlm 6, 1 Pet 5:13
Paul is like a mother.	1 Thess 2:7
Christians are children of "the free woman."	Gal 4:31
True circumcision is circumcision of the heart, symbolizing membership in the family of God.	Rom 2:25-29, 4:9-12
Israel is like a woman giving birth to a male child.	Rev 12:1-6, 13-17
Eschatological Babylon is like a whore.	Rev 17:3-6, 15,16; 18:3,7, 19:2
Christ's feast with the	Rev 19:7-9

<sup>24</sup> Gangel, *Toward a Biblical Theology of Marriage and Family*, 318-331.

believers is like a wedding.	
Adultery is a synonym for worldliness.	James 4:4

Children, fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, husbands, wives—all are to treat one another with monogamy, fidelity, chastity, nurture, unity and equality.

Jack and Judy Balswick also offer a theological model for family relationships. Theirs is comprised of four elements: Covenant—an unalterable commitment to one another; Grace—the extending of unconditional forgiveness and understanding; Empowering—seeking to help one another experience and live out the fullness of their design; and Intimacy—allowing one another access to the deepest parts of ourselves.<sup>25</sup> These elements ought to be present for all healthy, intimate relationships be they between God and man, husband and wife, brother and sister, friend and neighbor, or friend and friend. They are also what we need to practice in the Family of God.

The great challenge for those in the Family of God rests, however, not so much in the “what” of who we are but in the “how” of carrying it out. No human family is perfect and neither is the church, since it consists of people who still sin and who carry certain unhealthy habits and incorrect mindsets from their human families of origin. Yet, we have the opportunity in the eternal family of God to learn and re-learn how to live together and with one another and with our neighbors in this world. We can learn to have healthy relationships in every sphere of human experience—marriage, friendships, acquaintances, enemies and strangers—based on the Word of God and, through the power of the Holy

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<sup>25</sup> Balswick, *The Family*, 21-33.

Spirit, the application of its commands and principles. This will bear good fruit both in this life and for the life to come.

### The Character of Community – God’s Instructions for the Body.

#### *The Early Church.*

When we think of renewal it begs the question, “renewed (back) to what?”

The early days of the first Christian believers and the church, recorded in both their glory and imperfection still serve as a picture of fresh faith and sanctifying growth for individuals and for the church together. Acts 2:42-47 is often the primary scripture referenced when wanting to describe or encapsulate the lifestyle and positive example of the early church:

And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (NASB)

And a similar passage in chapter 4, verses 32-35:

And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them.... (NASB)

So the believers in Jerusalem met together daily for fellowship, teaching, sharing of meals and prayer. Although it is not clear if any actually lived or moved in together beyond their own family or extended family units, believers did choose to let go of their *sense of personal ownership* of their possessions and made them available to one another as any had need. As a result, not only were they blessed by living such generous shared lives, but they also had a significant influence on the people around them as many became Christians through their witness.

The book of Acts records the church growing in numbers, in their understanding of the scriptures, in fellowship with one another and in the power of the Holy Spirit. They dealt with sin and obstacles to growth as they encountered them (e.g. in chapter 6 with an argument between the Hellenistic Jews and native Hebrews, the Jerusalem Council in chapter 15). They learned to support the growing kingdom within and among them, as well as beyond them, as they supported the Apostle Paul and his companions in bringing the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome in Paul's three missionary journeys. We see freshness to life and willingness to trust and learn-as-you-go as characteristic of the early church experience, even as needed organization and order were also developed to undergird it. Christians had the Great Commandment and Great Commission fresh in their minds and hearts and sought to daily pursue them.

When modern day believers speak of renewal this is often what they envision—returning to the newness, freshness—and sense of community—evident in the account of the New Testament church. The above verses in Acts,

chapters two and four record a time before the church became largely persecuted. It was kind of a post-Pentecost honeymoon period where the church was growing and the believers were “enjoying the favor of all the people” (Acts 2:47). It is easy to think of believers’ experience in that time as a utopia.

However, it was not long after these events in the early chapters of Acts that the church in Jerusalem began to undergo persecution from without and encounter struggles within. Chapter 7 records the stoning of Stephen, after which the church was scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (8:1-3). This persecution from without brought great strife, but also had a positive effect in the spreading of the gospel and the ultimate growth of the church both in quality and quantity. Struggles from without often serve to bind people together for mutual support and strengthening, and so persecuted believers were firmed up in their faith as they withstood these trials and remained united, further spreading the fragrance of Christ to the world around them (2 Cor 2:14).

Struggles from within can tend to pull us apart, however. Being united in faith in Christ did (and does) not prevent believers from having disagreements, dissensions and conflicts with one another. Disagreements and strife can bring sorrow and discomfort initially. From Jerusalem to Rome New Testament churches faced plenty of challenges and conflicts. There was conflict caused by false teachers, which was a kind of hybrid of pressure from both without and within (depending on whether the teachers were truly a part of the church). Paul devoted parts of several of his letters warning believers against and addressing false teaching of Gnostics and Judaizers (Galatians, Philippians, Colossians,

1Timothy and Titus). There were also many instances regarding problems with Christian conduct. Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth alone addressed multiple problems such as immaturity, instability, divisions, jealousy and envy, lawsuits, marital difficulties, sexual immorality and misuse of spiritual gifts.<sup>26</sup> All of the New Testament epistles in some way address issues of Christian attitude and conduct, either coming from a negative angle by admonishing the bad or from a positive one, encouraging the good. As believers responded positively to conviction and correction, however, they were able to return to peace and harmony in their fellowship, even while storms of persecution may have raged outwardly.

Paul's letters in particular are known for their strong theological instruction, followed by practical teaching and application. It is the practical application and teaching in regard to Christian conduct in relationships to which we now turn, specifically in the book of Ephesians.

### *Teaching from Ephesians*

For the first three chapters of the epistle to the Ephesians Paul presents a sweeping outline of the purpose of God for believers and for the church. In chapter two he states that when we were dead in our sins (v. 5) out of God's great love and mercy through Christ he made us alive, in order to be a testimony for the ages to come (v. 7) and so that we may, as his workmanship, walk in the good works he has planned for us to walk in (v. 10). Furthermore, through Christ

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<sup>26</sup> New American Standard Study Bible, Introduction to 1 Corinthians (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 1661.



God has broken down walls of enmity between us and him, and between us and other people (v. 14). He intends for us to experience his peace and reconciliation in every relationship as part of his family, his household (v. 19). With these truths as the foundation of our identity and purpose, Paul goes on to instruct Christians in chapters 4-6 specifically on how to live this out with one another:

4:1: This verse serves as a preamble to all of the practical guidance that he is about to deliver: Because of who we are and what God has done for us, Paul urges believers to “walk in a manner worthy” of that high calling.

4:2: Christians are to treat one another with humility, gentleness, patience and tolerance.

4:3: They are to be “diligent to preserve unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

4:7-13: Christians are to recognize that God has variously gifted them and they are to use those gifts to help build one another up into full maturity in Christ.

4:14-16: As we speak the truth in a loving manner to one another, we will grow to become more like Christ.

4:25: We must always tell the truth.

4:26: We mustn't let our anger overcome us but deal with the issue(s) as quickly as possible.

4:28: Use your energies to do good, not evil. Share with others.

4:29: Use no vile language but instead use your words for good and to build others up.

4:31: No bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander and malice.

4:32: Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving—just as God is toward you.

5:2: Walk in love.

5:3: Let no immorality or greed be pursued or even spoken of among you.

5:4: No improper talk (vulgarity, silliness, coarse joking); instead give thanks with your lips.

5:6-10: Don't let yourself be deceived by untruth; instead, seek to please the Lord.

5:11: Expose dark deeds rather than participate in them.

5:15-17: Walk wisely and make the most of your time by understanding God's will.

5:18-20: If you are to live in "excess" do so by means of praising God, encouraging one another and giving thanks.

5:21: Submit to one another in love and humility.

5:22-24 & 33: Wives should submit to and respect their husbands out of reverence for God.

5:25-33: Husbands should love their wives as a reflection of how Christ loves the church, giving his all for her.

6:1-3: Children should obey and honor their parents.

6:4: Fathers should be understanding toward their children, even as they bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

6:5-8: Slaves should obey their masters or bosses, understanding that they are ultimately serving God.

6:9: Masters should also recognize that they are ultimately serving God and are accountable to him for how they treat their servants or employees.

6:10-17: Believers must remember that they are allies, not enemies, and as such they need to strengthen themselves with spiritual armor to battle the devil and his schemes.

6:18: Believers are to pray for one another.

In summary, in both attitude and action Paul instructs Ephesian believers to be loving toward one another as they live in Christian community, under the love of God expressed through Christ. This theme and its specifics are found throughout the New Testament in the teachings of Paul, John, Peter, and of

course Jesus himself in the four gospels. Believers are members of a “new society” as John Stott states in the title of his book on Ephesians,<sup>27</sup> where we are able to unlearn the mindset and ways of our former, unredeemed life, and learn new attitudes and practices, those keeping in line with God’s character, kingdom, will and design. There is a process to this, however. Sanctification takes time, requiring patience on the part of everyone as we seek and allow one another to “grow up into the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13).

### *The “One Anothers.”*

Interpersonal relationships are often the most blessed—and the most difficult—aspects of living life in the Body of Christ, and in life in general. We were created for community and yet so often our attitudes and actions and those of others serve to injure relationships and tear our unity and fellowship apart. Although Christians are declared righteous through their faith in Christ, righteous actions are slow in growing into that reality. Such is life in a fallen world and in the growth process. Thankfully, God has given us his Word and his Spirit to help us to grow and move forward individually and together into the life of full unity and harmony that he died for us to experience. While we will never achieve that utopia in this life, we can grow closer to it in the sanctification process together. We can cooperate with the process by renewing our minds with God’s truth in the scriptures (Rom 12:2) as well as by encouraging one another to live out a life of joyful obedience characterized by love and good deeds (Heb 10:24).

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<sup>27</sup> John R. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1979).

One exercise that believers have used to help in the renewing of their minds and absorbing God's instructions for interpersonal relationships is by gathering and meditating on a list of the "one another" passages in scripture. More than 50 passages the New Testament include the words "one another" as the writers describe and/or address relationships among believers. Instructions and admonitions contained in these verses relate to the ways we should think and behave in our interpersonal relationships. (A list of forty is contained Appendix A.) Eleven of the verses specifically instruct believers to love one another (love one another, love as brothers, having a debt of love toward one another, etc.). Other verbs of exhortation include "be at peace" (Mark 9:50), "be devoted... honor" (Rom 12:10), "Live in harmony...do not be proud...do not be conceited" (Rom 12:16), instruct (Rom 15:4), agree with (1 Cor 1:10), wait for (1 Cor 11:33), greet (Rom 16:16), show equal concern for (1 Cor 12:25), serve (Gal 5:13), bear with (Eph 4:2), forgive (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13) and many others. By meditating on these verses and putting them into practice with the Holy Spirit's help, believers can learn and grow into God's way of relating in his kingdom and his world and be able to more fully enjoy the fruit of peace, harmony and righteousness that he intends for his children.

### *Dealing with Challenges and Conflict*

As good as relationships in the Family of God are intended to be there will be inevitable conflict. Whether due to miscommunication, misunderstanding, differences of opinion or outright sin, as long as we are part of a fallen world Christians will periodically or regularly end up at odds with one another. When

this does happen two key teachings from Christ recorded in the Gospel of Matthew serve as ultimate guides.

First, addressing sin or potential sin in another: In Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus teaches that “If your brother sins; go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” (NASB) Jesus clearly teaches his disciples that if we know or seriously suspect that someone has sinned (presumably against us though not necessarily) it is incumbent on us to address it with them. If he or she is not willing to recognize their sin Jesus prescribes the process for moving forward in dealing with the person: first, bring another believer with you for a second confrontation; second, if unsuccessful, bring it to the elders and/or to the church.

Second, addressing your own offense or potential offense against another: In Matthew 5:23-24 in the context of anger (verses 21-22) Jesus said, “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.” (NASB) Here Jesus shows that if we become aware that we have offended someone else, it is incumbent on us to go to that person and seek to be reconciled. The power of these two teachings together is that no matter whether we are at fault or another person is, we are responsible to take the initiative to

face them and the issue and to seek reconciliation and/or restoration. Even more powerful, as evidenced in the second passage, is the revelation that God considers dealing with conflict so important in the family of God that he considers facing and engaging with it *even more important than continuing to worship Him*. Clearly God desires his children to seek peace and reconciliation at all times and in every way. Conflict engagement and resolution—or from a positive angle, peacemaking and reconciliation—are Kingdom values which in our Lord's perspective are non-negotiable and must become part of the Body of Christ's DNA.

This confirms the premise that the Kingdom of God is all about relationships—reconciled relationships between God and mankind, and mankind with one another. As we first have become reconciled to God, so we are able to be reconciled to one another and can begin to live in and multiply Christian communities of love, forgiveness and grace. This is what draws the unbelieving world to the Savior: not the perfection of the saints, but the beauty of Christ and His redemption and reconciliation lived out among believers. As the New Testament church—and we—strive to realize peace and harmony in our daily, practical reality, people may be added to the church daily as in Acts chapter two.

#### *A Word about Mission*

Rodney Clapp, in his book *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional and Modern Options*, states that the health and well-being of the family is not an end in itself. As the famous first lines of Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose*

*Driven Life* say, “It’s not about you.”<sup>28</sup> Since the family—as well as every individual—is created by God, it is created for a purpose beyond merely maintaining itself. Clapp points out the ironic truth that “paradoxically, a family is enriched when it is decentered, relativized, [and] recognized as less than an absolute.”<sup>29</sup> This happens when we as families – and ultimately as the Body of Christ—experience the joy of being “united in spirit and intent on one purpose.” (Phil 2:2)

The unconscious and natural consequence of believers obediently living in harmony with one another and seeking the peace of God’s Kingdom, is fruit—missional fruit. The Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 2:9 tells believers, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;” (NASB) Here Peter describes believers’ corporate identity as being “chosen, “holy”, and in the NIV, God’s “special possession.” Here believers’ identity is inextricably tied to God’s purpose. This verse shows that God created us *so that* we may be a witness of God and his “excellencies” as we tell of his saving grace. As we experience *koinonia* together and pursue God’s peace, others will inevitably be drawn to the Savior—the Source of our identity and call.

Jesus prayed for believers in John 17:22b & 23, “...That they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to

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<sup>28</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Running Press Miniature Edition, 2003), 10.

<sup>29</sup> Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional and Modern Options* (Downer’s Grove, IL Intervarsity Press, 1993), 86.

complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” He also said in John 13:35, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” The body of Christ should be encouraged—and appropriately sobered—to know that how we relate to one another in the family of God has a direct influence on the quality and “quantity” of our witness. More than for the sake of experiencing unhindered *koinonia* within the family, seeking peace and harmony amongst ourselves is absolutely crucial in influencing the fruitfulness of our efforts to spread the gospel to our lost and needy world.



### CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Throughout church history, believers have sought to find ways to get closer to God and to one another in community. The New Testament Church, the early Church Fathers, monastics, utopian and eschatological communities and contemporary intentional communities have all sought in similar ways and in varied forms to draw close to God and experience authentic unity with Him and community with one another. History has shown that many of these intentional efforts met with a kind of success that had a profound impact on both the members of the community and the world around them and at large. Great renewal movements have often been associated with these efforts. The contemporary church can learn much from these, from both their failures and their successes. As we learn from God, His Word and from one another we can grow and move forward in transforming into the individuals and people of God that He intends us to be, individually and together as His Body, His family, His Temple.

All groups and communities, whether Christian or secular, have ways that they operate—written and unwritten rules—which they follow in regard to interpersonal relationships as well as to achieving shared goals. Modern systems theory helps us understand patterns that operate within a system and can be very helpful in explaining behavior as well as learning how to work through inevitable difficulties that are encountered within a system. This chapter will examine various elements of systems theory applied in the church and community context, with a view toward application. As these principles are

practically applied Christians will be better equipped to understand and face inevitable conflict and as a result live into a more deep and authentic experience of *koinonia*.

## Historical Christian Communities in Spiritual Renewal

### *The Early Church*

In considering the building of healthy community and *koinonia* we can be informed and inspired by believers in the past. The Church at all times and in all places has been comprised of groups of believers gathered together in local bodies, seeking to worship God and to carry out the Great Commandment (Matthew 27:37-39) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) together.

In the early centuries of the church, Christians were a persecuted minority. And yet, they eventually had a great influence on the world around them through their unheard of doctrine and particularly through their acts of love.

In his book, *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark explains, as the subtitle states, “How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries.”<sup>1</sup> Writing from a purely sociological perspective, he explains how the lifestyles of Christians positively affected society around them. Not only did they love one another but they had the courage to love their enemies and neighbors in the most difficult of times.

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<sup>1</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1997).

First, Christianity spread through relationships—and often directly and indirectly through the diasporan Jews. The third chapter of Stark's book explains how the Jews were well-prepared to understand the Gospel themselves (they were the majority of the first converts) but they also inadvertently helped prepare the pagan cultures they were in for the gospel due to the fact that their monotheism and lifestyles were already drawing the curiosity and interest of observers.

In addition, while Christianity appealed to those in all strata of society (chapter 2) it particularly appealed to women in a powerful way due to the respect and value given to them in contrast to the culture. Many Christian women ended up marrying pagans and many pagan husbands converted and their children swelled the ranks, as well. (chapter 5).

Also of note were periodic epidemics which actually helped to grow the Church. Christians were willing to care for the sick and as such were a great witness to unbelievers. Although, a significant number of Christians died themselves through infection, still many became immune as well. In addition, the basic nursing care that believers administered frequently led to the recovery of their patients, many of whom came to faith in Christ, as well. Stark gives a formula in chapter four to calculate how the percentage of believers grew through conversions and survival rates which is surprising in its multiplication.

Finally, in his last chapter Stark gives credit to the actual message of the gospel, as well, as *A Brief Reflection on Virtue*. He describes the message of Christianity as being both appealing and efficacious. Truths and teachings were

genuinely helpful to people in their lives, the healthier lifestyle benefitted them, all crowned by the promise of the hereafter for the believer.

### *Monastics*

As the decades and centuries passed, the church waxed and waned in its spiritual fervor, frequently drifted in its focus, and lost its sense of identity and purpose. The church became particularly susceptible to this after Constantine paved the way for Christianity to become the official state religion beginning in 313 A.D.<sup>2</sup> (confirmed by Theodosius I in 380).<sup>3</sup> In these periods of drift and decline, individuals often stepped forth from within or from the fringes of the church seeking to re-capture the heart of the faith. They attempted to achieve this by shutting out or pulling aside from the pressures of their society and seeking to recalibrate and renew their focus on God and his purposes as revealed in scripture. Others seeking spiritual revitalization were inspired to join them, and movements of renewal were often birthed in these communities.

Antony in Egypt (251-356 A.D.) is popularly considered to be the first monastic or the “father of monasticism.” Rather than residing on the outskirts of a city as other ascetics at the time Antony went further and retreated into the desert. His acts inspired others to pursue a monastic vocation as well as helped spark revival in the larger church.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas TX: Word Publishing, 1982), 105.

<sup>3</sup> Shelley, *Church History*, 110.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism: What it Has to Say to Today's Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 43.

St. Benedict of Nursia in Italy was born in A.D. 480 and founded several monasteries in Subiaco, north of Rome and served as abbot at Monte Cassino in the south. He is best known for the writing of his “Rule” around 530 A.D.<sup>5</sup> which outlines precepts for monks to live by and instructions for running a monastery. Traditionally the Benedictine life focused on the qualities of obedience and humility as well as community and contemplation.<sup>6</sup> Its daily practice revolved around work and the eight “hours” or offices of prayer about three hours apart (beginning with midnight *Matins*, followed by *Lauds* at 3:00 a.m., *Prime* at 6:00 a.m., *Terce* at 9:00 a.m., *Sext* at noon, *None* at 3:00 p.m., *Vespers* at 6:00 p.m. and *Compline* at 9:00 p.m.). Benedict’s Rule and its variations have been used as a guide for many individuals,<sup>7</sup> religious orders<sup>8</sup> and communities and groups throughout church history, and it remains the most popular and influential rule for monastery life to this day.

Other monastics of note over the centuries who have had significant influence on the church, their society and the world include St. Patrick (375/405-460/493 A.D.) and St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226 A.D.).<sup>9</sup> Patrick, a Romanized Briton, was a former slave in Ireland. Having become converted to Christ in the midst of his slavery and miraculously escaping, he later became a bishop in the British church and returned to Ireland as a missionary. Many Irish were won to

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy Fry, Editor, *The Rule of Saint Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: Vintage Spiritual Classics by the Order of Saint Benedict, 1998), xxxv.

<sup>6</sup> Fry, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, xviii-xxiv.

<sup>7</sup> For example, in a 1996 book, *The Cloister Walk*, Kathleen Norris (a self-described “doubter” and Benedictine oblate) reflects on and extols the Benedictine life of contemplation, work and prayer.

<sup>8</sup> Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism*, 46.

<sup>9</sup> For example, the *Community of Jesus* on Cape Cod.

<sup>9</sup> Donald Spoto, *Reluctant Saint: The Life of Francis of Assisi* (New York: Penguin Compass, 2003).

Christ through his preaching with many enthusiastic converts being subsequently drawn to monasticism and living in monastic communities. “White martyrs” were monks who left Ireland as missionaries to spread the gospel, with “red martyrs” being those who lost their lives in the process. “Green martyrs” were those who stayed in Ireland and are credited not only with continuing gospel preaching but also helping re-establish literacy throughout the post-Roman world as they focused on transcribing not only the scriptures but everything they could find in Greek and Latin.<sup>10</sup>

St. Francis was the father of the Lesser Brothers—or the Franciscan Order as later recognized in the early thirteenth century. His conversion and call to “rebuild the church” (both literally and figuratively) inspired scores of men and women to follow his simple rule “to follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in his footsteps.” Pursuing similar lives of chastity, poverty and serving the poor Franciscans and others served to challenge fellow believers in all times and places to take the teachings of Christ seriously. Their lives challenged others to be willing to choose similar priorities and make sacrifices that allow them to serve one another and a needy world to the fullest.<sup>11</sup>

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove a leader in the contemporary, so-called “New Monastic” movement credits Benedict and other monastic movements through the centuries with serving as reminders to the church of its true identity. He stresses that whether intentionally or unintentionally, these movements have

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (New York: Random House, Anchor Books, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Donald Spoto, *Reluctant Saint: The Life of Francis of Assisi* (New York: Viking Compass, 2002).

served and serve as witnesses and catalysts, calling the church at large to renewal. He states, “[Such movements] introduce the monastic impulse to relocate and reimagine our role from the margins of society.” He says that they help remind the church “to be the church.”<sup>12</sup>

### *Pietists*

Pietism is a movement that was influential from the late 1600's to the middle 1700's and following and emphasized pious devotion and living.<sup>13</sup> A significant forerunner of Pietism, the German theologian Johann Arndt (1555-1621) through his devotional writings—in particular *True Christianity*, originally published in 1612<sup>14</sup>—inspired many Lutherans to seek the new birth and faithful following of Christ. Although the Protestant Reformation had taken place only a few decades earlier (1521)<sup>15</sup> Arndt and some of his contemporaries were concerned that the church in Germany was becoming too absorbed in dry theological debate rather than modeling and exhorting vibrant and devoted Christian living. A few decades later, Philipp Jakob Spener, considered the Father of Pietism (1635-1705) inspired by Arndt's *True Christianity* also called church and society to renewal in his book *Pia Desideria* (Pious Wishes) originally published in 1675. A leader in the reform movement and living in the time of territory states, Spener called for reform on every level of society—the rulers, clergy and common people. His proposals and exhortations included preaching for the edification of the people,

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<sup>12</sup> Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism*, 46.

<sup>13</sup> Shelley, *Church History*, 345.

<sup>14</sup> Johann Arndt, *True Christianity*. Translated by Peter Erb. (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

<sup>15</sup> The date of Martin Luther's excommunication from the Roman Catholic Church.

the exercising of the spiritual priesthood by the clergy, and even instructions for conduct in religious controversies.<sup>16</sup>

A generation later, as a godson and student of Spener, Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760)—also inspired by the *Unitas Fratrum* (“Unity of the Brethren” which later became the Moravians)—in his efforts to live and call the church to devoted living began the community known as Herrnhut (the Watch of the Lord) in 1727 on his estate in Saxony.<sup>17</sup> Originally begun as a refuge for *Unitas Fratrum* exiles, Herrnhut became a community of believers who agreed to follow “The Brotherly Agreement of the brethren from Bohemia and Moravia and Others, Binding Them to Walk According to the Apostolic Rule,” or simply, the *Brotherly Agreement*, part of the introduction which reads: “... *the brethren do not, and will not separate themselves from any child of God in any denomination of Christians; we will unfeignedly love and own as brethren all children of God, let them belong to whatever denomination they may*”. While the community was highly ordered and disciplined, Zinzendorf rejected using Herrnhut as a measure by which other fellowships were to be judged. Instead, in keeping with the spirit of the *Unitas Fratrum* he recognized the “free connection between all the Churches, based on their ‘common love of the Saviour.’”<sup>18</sup>

Noted historian, Kenneth Scott Latourette said of the community of the Moravians:

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<sup>16</sup> Philip J. Spener, *Pia Desideria*. Theodore Tappert, translator, editor. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1964).

<sup>17</sup> A.J. Lewis, *Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 46.

<sup>18</sup> Lewis, *Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer*, 12.



Here was a new phenomenon in the expansion of Christianity, an entire community, of families as well as of the unmarried, devoted to the propagation of the faith. In its singleness of aim it resembled some of the monastic orders of earlier centuries... Here was a fellowship of Christians, of laity and clergy, of men and women, marrying and rearing families, with much of the quietism of the monastery and of Pietism but the spread of the Christian message as a major objective, not of a minority of the membership, but of the group as a whole.<sup>19</sup>

The Moravian's example and efforts to bring Christian unity and focus in mission to the church were significant. By focusing on the core of the faith – the first and second great commandments – they were able to keep the faith purer and to inspire believers apart from political or organizational concerns which tend to sidetrack. Their focus on prayer (they had 24-hour prayer commitments for over 100 years)<sup>20</sup> and healthy relationships within the Christian community as well as continual focus on the Lord Himself and His Kingdom, made a path for spiritual renewal for many – and set an example for future generations of believers to follow.

It was these very Moravians who were a significant influence on John Wesley (1703-1791), the father of Methodism. In 1738 Wesley spent some time at Herrnhut and was greatly influenced by their way of life and teaching, eventually incorporating elements from their organization and structure into Methodism. Wesley's teaching and methods held certain elements in common with other renewal movements, specifically his understanding of the church and

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<sup>19</sup> David A. Schattschneider "William Carey, Modern Missions and the Moravian Influence." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. 22 (January 1998), 8.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis, *Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer*, 60.

his goals for the movement. Like Zinzendorf and others, Wesley saw the groups of believers and seekers that he formed for prayer, study and accountability as being *ecclesiola in ecclesia*—churches or groups within the church. As a committed Anglican his aim was not to create a new church or denomination but to “form...a genuine people of God within the institutional church.”<sup>21</sup> Other distinctives of his movement were preaching to the poor, individuals being given spiritual leadership regardless of social class, and the adaptation of methods and forms to meet needs and objectives. As with many renewal movements the established church was suspicious and critical of Wesley, his teachings and methods. As with reformers before him such as Luther and Zinzendorf, Wesley wanted to minister within the established church and not to break with it, although this did eventually occur in later years.

### *Awakenings*

On the other side of the Atlantic revival and renewal were beginning to foment, as well. The First Great Awakening occurred in America in the 1730's and 40's with the apologist and theologian, a contemporary of Zinzendorf and Wesley, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) at the helm. The religious and social climate was ripe for revival as churches had become complacent, moving toward an unbiblical optimism in regard to the nature of God and mankind which Edwards believed to be a drift towards works righteousness. Revivalists urged the people to seek to confirm their election, through internal confirmation

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<sup>21</sup> Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1996), 2.

(sometimes accompanied by strong emotion) but particularly through evidence of changed lives.

The Second Great Awakening of 1820-1870 was spearheaded by pastor and evangelist Charles Finney (1792-1875). He traveled throughout the Northeast United States and through both private and public meetings called people to repentance and urged them to live out the realities of the faith in their lives.<sup>22</sup> Like others in places and times before him, Finney was not content with the tepid Christianity he saw around him, and after much prayer, set out to share his testimony of conversion and renewal. Finney's style of preaching was delivered in the language of the common people, and unlike the sermons of the day which were more like readings of "elegant literary essays,"<sup>23</sup> Finney spoke straightforwardly to the people and in the language of the people. He directly called people to come forward and choose to give their lives to Christ. All of his meetings were preceded by days of concerted prayer and converts were encouraged to join a church of their choice. The spread and scope of these awakenings had a powerful effect on the moral climate of society and brought millions of new members into the church. The pattern of revivals as being preceded by spiritual atrophy of the church, much prayer on the part of concerned believers, and the raising up of a strong personality and/or group to spearhead a movement is born out through the great awakenings. These and

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<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Edwards, C.C. Goen, ed. *The Great Awakening* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972).

<sup>23</sup> Charles Finney, *Memoirs*, ed. Garth Rosell and Richard Dupuis (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 83.

other revivals involve a combination of a strong move of the Holy Spirit along with clear cooperation and intentionality on the part of people called and involved.

Of significant note — in England just before and in the early years of the Second Great Awakening — was the fellowship and influence of a group called the “Clapham Sect” (so named by James Stephen in an article of 1844 which celebrated the work of these reformers)<sup>24</sup> and of which *William Wilberforce* (1759-1833) was a central figure. (Clapham was the name of the small village southwest of London in which many of the group lived.) In his book, *Saints in Politics*, Ernest M. Howse describes the propitious coming together of this group of believers who had common passions and interests, as well as various yet similar vocations. The sect consisted of statesmen such as William Wilberforce and Henry Thornton, clergymen such as John Venn and Thomas Clarkson, diplomats such as Lord Teignmouth, and researchers such as Zachary Macaulay and Granville Sharp. Banding together for religious and humanitarian causes the Clapham Sect small as it was, was a major catalyst in bringing about societal transformation and betterment of life to millions, both slave and free.

The times were ripe for the influence of such a gathering of talented, motivated and influential group of public servants. The moral decay of the times—profligacy of the rich and squalor and degradation of the poor—was of a kind that would stir men of Christian conscience with a desire for renewal of civility and morality in the nation. The evangelical zeal of these believing statesmen—quite a few of whom were recent converts—along with the

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<sup>24</sup> Stephen Tomkins, *The Clapham Sect: How Wilberforce's Circle Changed Britain* (Oxford: Lion, 2010), 1.

advantage and responsibility afforded them by their positions of leadership and influence in society, put them in what they understood to be a God-given position to help bring about change. This they did in a manner which is remarkable in both in its scope and in its unflagging zeal.

Along with a concern for slaves they also had care for the downtrodden and exploited in English society. While they fought politically for abolition and emancipation of slaves abroad, they focused their philanthropic efforts on alleviating the suffering of the poor in England. They also had a special interest in the spiritual health and salvation of those to whom they had a national, moral responsibility and so they formed the *Church Missionary Society* as well as *The British & Foreign Bible Society* and they were also key champions of the Sunday School Movement. Many speeches were given, public agitation for their causes was roused, and literature was published to gain and sustain support for their causes.

No doubt the convergence of their personalities, stages in life, significant positions of influence, as well as friendship and family ties lent themselves to such collaborative efforts. Of special significance, however, was the fact that they lived in physical proximity to one another. While it is not clearly understood whether this proximity was intentional or incidental, descriptions given by observers of the quality of fellowship they had together are striking. R. Coupland in his book *Wilberforce* wrote,

It was the custom of the circle...to consider every member of that coterie as forming part of a large, united family, who should behave to each other with the same simplicity and absence of formality, which, in the usual way, characterizes

intercourse only among the nearest of relatives. They were in the habit of either assembling at the same watering places...or else spending them in one another's houses, taking with them as a matter of course their wives and children...Remarkable above all else, perhaps, in its closeness, its affinity. It not only lived for the most part in one little village; it had one character, one mind, one way of life...It was doubtless this homogeneity, this unanimity, that gave the group its power in public life. They might differ on party issues; but on any question of religion or philanthropy the voice of the "Saints" in Parliament or the press, was as the voice of one man. It was indeed, a unique phenomenon – this brotherhood of Christian politicians. There has never been anything like it since in British public life.<sup>25</sup>

Henry Thornton is quoted in a letter he wrote to Charles Grant in 1793:

On the whole, I am in hope that some good may come out of our Clapham system....I am surprised to find how much religion everybody seems to have when they come into our house. They all seem to submit, and to acknowledge the advantage of a religious life, and we are not at all queer or guilty of carrying things too far.<sup>26</sup>

G. W. E. Russell observed,

Emphasis on family life was only natural. It was a feature of Evangelical religion...what Wilberforce called 'true Christians' who knew what it was to practice 'saintliness in daily life,' and by whom the minutest details of action were 'considered with reference to Eternity.' They were in fact the chief lay representatives of the Evangelical religion of their day, the admitted lay leaders of that small party which, 'amid an almost universal deadness,' 'kept alive the flame of spiritual religion' in the Church of England.<sup>27</sup>

There was intentionality in pursuing "true religion" and personal piety and a quality of *koinonia* that seemed to drive the group and fan and sustain both a

<sup>25</sup> R. Coupland, *Wilberforce: A Narrative*. (Oxford, 1923), 251.

<sup>26</sup> Henry Morris, *The Life of Charles Grant*. (London: John Murray, 1904), 200.

<sup>27</sup> G.W.E. Russell, *The Household of Faith*, (London: 1906), 234, quoted in E.M. Howse, *Saints in Politics: The 'Clapham Sect' and the Growth of Freedom*. (London: The Paternoster Press, 1965), 170-171.

flame for God and for promoting His truth and grace in their time and in their sphere of influence. In this way the Clapham Sect moved in the same spirit and yielded similar manifold fruit to that of renewal movements throughout the centuries. The regularity, depth and breadth of their fellowship resembled that of other focused and intentional Christian communities. While they may not have lived in an intentional or tightly organized community like Herrnhut—as commanded in scripture, they clearly met together regularly and spurred one another on to love and many good deeds (Hebrews 10:24-25).

### Contemporary Interest in Community

Twentieth century American evangelical Christianity faced many challenges—struggles from without as mentioned in the previous chapter. For the first time Christians could no longer “take for granted a sympathetic audience.”<sup>28</sup> Loren Mead describes this as the church moving from a Christendom paradigm understanding of its place in the world where they are the majority, back to a more Apostolic paradigm, where the church was a (persecuted) minority.<sup>29</sup> Such pressures could lead many Christians to retrench and band more tightly together in order to support one another in biblical living as well as to have a united voice as Christians in the culture.

In their book *The Gospel in America: Themes in the Story of American Evangelicals* authors Woodbridge, Noll and Hatch state that Evangelical unity was being “diluted” though such theological phenomena including

<sup>28</sup> John D Woodbridge, Mark A Noll and Nathan O. Hatch, *The Gospel in America: Themes in the Story of American Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), 33.

<sup>29</sup> Loren Mead, *The Once and Future Church* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1994).

Dispensationalism, Liberalism and Pentecostalism in the 1800s.<sup>30</sup> With the influence of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (published in 1859) an anti-supernatural world view became increasingly main stream with science becoming that which set the pace for American intellectual life rather than the Bible or theology.<sup>31</sup> In addition, challenges continued to come from Liberal Theology, attacking the authority of the Bible in their "scientific study of religion."<sup>32</sup> At the same time as most likely encouraged by these challenges and "new options" for belief, increasing segments of society were turning away from traditional Christianity. The Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy of the 1920s and 30s could be seen as the point where competing ideologies and world views came to a head, and as a result many if not most fundamentalist /evangelical Christians withdrew into an entrenched defensive stance against culture, in a kind of "domestic exile"<sup>33</sup> in the decades ensuing, disengaging from social and political influence and focusing almost exclusively on the saving of souls. Mark Noll in his book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, describes this as "The failure "...to think like a Christian about the nature and workings of the physical world, the character of human social structures like government and the economy, the meaning of the past, the nature of artistic creation and the circumstances attending our perception of the world outside ourselves..."<sup>34</sup>

By the 1970s, however, Evangelicals had retrenched and regrouped enough to begin to unite in thoughtful responses to the theological and

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<sup>30</sup> Mead, *The Once and Future Church*, 32.

<sup>31</sup> Mead, *The Once and Future Church*, 33.

<sup>32</sup> Mead, *The Once and Future Church*, 50.

<sup>33</sup> Woodbridge, Noll and Hatch, *The Gospel in America*, 79.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 7.



intellectual challenges of modernity. Woodbridge, Noll and Hatch cite John Harold Ockenga's call for a "new evangelicalism" as a turning point. Ockenga<sup>35</sup> called for an evangelicalism that would be theologically orthodox, open to scholarship and sensitive to the social and political problems of the nations.<sup>36</sup>

While this was a new day of evangelical identification and re-engagement with society, some lamented that this Evangelical resurgence lacked any significant social justice emphasis. Dubbed "the Great Reversal" by sociologist David Moberg,<sup>37</sup> there was concern that the idea of service to mankind and care for the poor had been abandoned long ago to the Liberal Church. Theologian Carl Henry described this in the chapter three of his book, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, entitled "The Most Embarrassing Evangelical Divorce."<sup>38</sup> Randall Balmer in *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into Evangelical Subculture in America*, suggests that Evangelicals' apparent lack of compassion for the downtrodden of the society and the world but for the downtrodden in their own midst could stem from having felt battered themselves by the larger culture for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet he urges extrication from a defensive stance to one that engages redemptively with the world by pointing out that "The real drama of life lies not in clinging to the bulwark

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<sup>35</sup> Ockenga helped found Fuller (1947) and Gordon-Conwell (1969) theological seminaries as well as the National Association of Evangelicals (1942).

<sup>36</sup> Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 127.

<sup>37</sup> Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 40.

<sup>38</sup> Carl F.H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 27.

of moral absolutes but in using a moral compass to navigate along the shoals of secularism.”<sup>39</sup>

Clearly, increasing secularism has cost the Church in America in terms of numbers. Yet as scripture and history attest, struggle involves opportunity for witness to the truth as well as to strengthen the faithful as they band together to face attacks and challenge. Christianity has arguably had the greatest effect not so much when Christians have been in the majority as when they have been in the minority. At the same time, however, more than ever in the United States, faithful Christians face challenges in keeping Christ central, and in our affluent age not so much from overt challenges to the truth of the faith, as from the materialistic, secular values of the culture. Christian parents for example are faced with competing loyalties for Sunday morning activities – do they attend church or their child’s soccer match? Divorce rates skyrocket as we are told that perceived personal satisfaction is more important than loyalty and commitment. Christian singles are told that they can find love more readily in the bar scene than in the Body of Christ, or that experimenting with homosexuality is good. Our culture tells us that everything we can do to gain power and prestige or to indulge our fantasies and lusts is preferable to biblical values of family, community, humility, kindness, self-control and service to others. Nearly everywhere we turn we are blasted with media and culture’s messages that self-made idols ought to be on the throne of our lives. And ironically yet predictably, this has left people in our culture—both Christian and non-Christian—feeling lonely and adrift.

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<sup>39</sup> Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into Evangelical Subculture in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 255.

Therefore accumulating pressures of modern life have taken a serious toll on believers, imperiling us from two directions. First, the culture's more direct, antagonistic stance against Christianity, and secondly the lure to drift from godly pursuits and priorities brought on by the shallowness of much of modern culture.

Recognizing this, various authors over the last few decades have helped turn our eyes back toward God's plan for our lives together. Rather than accepting the fragmentation that following the values of the world brings to our lives, they encourage us to discover again the riches of our identity in Christ as individuals, and especially as His family together.

#### *Body Life: Bonhoeffer & Stedman*

Considered a classic among Christians today, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's small book, *Life Together* was written in 1938 when he was living as part of an underground seminary during the Nazi years in Germany. Rather than waxing about Christian community in utopian terms, Bonhoeffer instead defined *koinonia* in more objective, biblical terms, insisting that "we are bound together by faith, not by experience"<sup>40</sup> and that Christian community is "not an idea but a divine reality."<sup>41</sup> He declared community to denote community "through and in Jesus Christ"— nothing more and certainly nothing less. "Whether it be a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: A Discussion of Christian Fellowship* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1954), 30.

<sup>41</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 26.

<sup>42</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 21.

Bonhoeffer contrasted “spiritual love” with “human love,” holding up the spiritual as the quality of love in community. Whereas human love seeks to absorb the other and thus is in actuality demanding and self-centered, spiritual love loves another for Christ’s sake.<sup>43</sup> He stated that “He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.”<sup>44</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s teaching has served to check ill-motivated utopian pursuit of community for experience’s sake, and reminds us that in the Body of Christ we are in community with everyone who belongs to Him, no matter whether we like it or not. It remains for us to decide how faithfully, lovingly and biblically we will treat and work with one another.

Another twentieth century contemporary author’s writing has had a significant influence on how Christians “do community” in recent decades. Written in the midst of the Jesus Movement of the 1960s and 70s Ray Stedman’s wrote the book, *Body Life* (published in 1972) which has served as a kind of “operations manual” for new generations of Christians in the church and in parachurch movements. Focusing on Ephesians 4:1-16 he states its purpose “to search out from the scripture the nature and function of true Christianity and thus to recover the dynamic quality of early Christianity.”<sup>45</sup> He points out that “whenever spiritual awakenings have occurred throughout the Christian centuries they have always been accompanied by a restoration of *koinonia*, of the

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<sup>43</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 34.

<sup>44</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 26.

<sup>45</sup> Ray Stedman, *Body Life* (Glendale, CA: G/L Regal Books, 1972), 5.

confessions of faults, and the bearing of one another's burdens."<sup>46</sup> Another contemporary writer and Christian psychologist, Larry Crabb, describes this as "therapeutic relating," an integral element of healing community.<sup>47</sup>

Drawing from the metaphor of the church being the Body of Christ (4:4, 16) for his title, Stedman stated that the purpose of the church was to cause each member to grow into the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ as we live together in unity (although not uniformity). Differentiating two kinds of unity—external and internal—he contended that what is missing in spiritual health is the experience of "body life"—*koinonia* characterized by internal unity. While the very differences which make the church beautiful can also cause friction (Eph. 4:3) so Stedman urged believers to focus on 7 elements which are the basis of our unity: 1) "There is one body, and 2) one Spirit just as you were called to 3) one hope when you were called; 4) one Lord, 5) one faith, 6) one baptism; and 7) one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. He also urged the development of Home Bible Classes for study and fellowship as well as "Body Life Services" where attendees were able to publically share needs or confessions and/or give testimony of God's positive work in their lives. This "Body Life" teaching also helped inspire the small group movement which took off in churches in the last decades of the twentieth century.

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<sup>46</sup> Stedman, *Body Life*, 111.

<sup>47</sup> Larry Crabb, *Connecting: A Radical New Vision. Healing for ourselves and our relationships.* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1997), 97.

### *The Emerging Church and New Monasticism*

In the last two decades of the twentieth century and the current early twenty-first, various movements have emerged, seeking to bring more cohesion, relevance and clarity to the expression and witness of evangelical Christianity in postmodern America. The Emergent Movement, sometimes called the emergent church or emergent conversation seeks to break the church out of traditional and static thinking and forms and to experiment with new approaches, in particular a rediscovering of older, more “vintage” forms of worship and expression. While there has been some concern over the theological orthodoxy of the movement due to its lack of doctrinal statement and its widely open theological dialog, its philosophy and methods seem to have sprung from a genuine desire to meaningfully engage postmodern people and postmodern culture, seeking God for how they may be more authentically Christian and to reflect that to our culture and world. Dan Kimball in his 2003 book, *The Emerging Church*, reflecting a desire for the church to break out of an unhealthy stereotype says, “We need to make sure that we are acting as the people of God in relation to each other first, and then the world, rather than merely an institution trying to perpetuate itself.”<sup>48</sup>

Developing alongside and in some measure along with the emergent movement, is another contemporary movement with a strong emphasis on community—New Monasticism. Sharing the emergent values of good works, social activism and missional living the concept was first introduced in Jonathan

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<sup>48</sup> Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 93.

Wilson-Hartgrove's 1998 book, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World*, and the term was embraced by leaders in the movement in 2004.<sup>49</sup>

Wilson-Hartgrove's ideas were inspired and developed from Saint Benedict and his above-mentioned Rule, as well as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his above-mentioned book *Life Together*. After having visited and observed the life and ministry to the poor by The Simple Way community, co-founded by Shane Claiborne in Philadelphia, Wilson-Hartgrove and his wife began their own intentional Christian community, Rutba House, in Durham, North Carolina. It was there that in 2004 leaders of new and pre-existing Christian communities gathered and embraced the New Monasticism moniker, as well as affirmed Wilson-Hartgrove's proposed Twelve Marks of New Monasticism, listed below (and in Appendix B).<sup>50</sup>

1. Relocation to the "abandoned places of Empire." [For many, these are depressed urban communities.]
2. Sharing economic resources with fellow community members and the needy among us. [Some, but not all communities choose to pool incomes.]
3. Hospitality to the stranger.
4. Lament for racial divisions within the church and our communities combined with the active pursuit of a just reconciliation. [Strong involvement in social justice.]
5. Humble submission to Christ's body, the Church. [New Monasticism is a pro-church movement.]

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<sup>49</sup> Rob Moll, "The New Monasticism", *Christianity Today*, (April 2008).

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The New Monasticism: What it has to Say to Today's Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 39.

6. Intentional formation in the way of Christ and the rule of the community along the lines of the old novitiate.
7. Nurturing common life among members of an intentional community.
8. Support for celibate singles alongside monogamous married couples and their children.
9. Geographical proximity to community members who share a common rule of life. [Often co-housing but at least in the same or nearby neighborhoods.]
10. Care for the plot of God's earth given to us along with support of our local economies.
11. Peacemaking in the midst of violence, and conflict resolution within communities along the lines of Matthew 18.
12. Commitment to a disciplined contemplative life.

Wilson-Hartgrove states that "The monastic tradition has known for hundreds of years, you have to sometimes relocate in order to really see the world and re-imagine your role within it."<sup>51</sup> He believes that monastic movements throughout the centuries serve to remind the Church of its true identity. "It's about helping the church be the church."<sup>52</sup> At the same time he advocates long term commitment to a community in a specific location, which he covers in detail in his 2010 book, *The Wisdom of Stability*.<sup>53</sup>

Another acknowledged leader of the New Monastic movement is Shane Claiborne, mentioned above, also an activist for non-violence and service to the poor. In his 2006 book *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*, he calls Christians to follow the vision of loving God, loving people and following

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<sup>51</sup> Wilson-Hartgrove, *The New Monasticism*, 77.

<sup>52</sup> Wilson-Hartgrove, *The New Monasticism*, 21.

<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Wisdom of Stability* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010).



Jesus as they do in his community, The Simple Way. He believes the result is that Christians will find themselves living in radically different ways than the mainstream of our culture—even our Christian culture. He challenges, “What if a fragile world is more attracted to God’s vision of interdependence and sacrificial sharing than to the mirage of independence and materialism?”<sup>54</sup> In regard to living in community he says, “Once we get past the rebellious or reactive countercultural paradigm and muster up the courage to try living in new ways, most of us find that community is very natural and makes a lot of sense, and that it’s not foreign to most of the world’s population as it is to us. Community is what we were created for.”<sup>55</sup> While Claiborne claims that their purpose is not to spread a model of community (although the Simple Way does sponsor a web site directory of intentional Christian communities, [www.communityofcommunities.info](http://www.communityofcommunities.info)) he does say that “We are about spreading a way of life that exists organically and relationally and is marked by such brilliant love and grace that no one could resist it.”<sup>56</sup>

### A Systemic Understanding of Community Dynamics

Now that we have observed a panorama of history of Christians in community up to the present day, we now turn to look more closely at the nature of communities. We ask the question, how can we better understand how people and communities operate and function—in particular, how can what we learn to

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<sup>54</sup> Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 21

<sup>55</sup> Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution*, 134.

<sup>56</sup> Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution*, 348.

better help us cooperate with God and one another in making them function as optimally as possible, as instruments of God's Spirit to accomplish God's purposes in our lives and the lives of others? It is to this end that we now turn to a study of systems theory.

### *Systems Theory*

Systems theory, specifically Bowen Theory in the field of family systems theory, is a specialization of systems thinking, where in this context a system is defined by one which has the capacity to self-regulate through feedback. Any group—or system with multiple parts or members—a family, church, business, nation—could be considered a system and thus operate according to certain principles or rules of that system.

Murray Bowen, a pioneer in the field of family therapy, and whose theory is named after him (Bowen Theory) identified eight key elements or interlocking characteristics of relational systems. The most important of these concepts is that of

- 1) "Self-Differentiation" where an individual is able to "individuate" themselves and operate as such within the emotional field of a group, without being absorbed, or losing their sense of self. (This self-differentiation is very similar to the concept of the need for healthy "boundaries" discussed in the widely popular book written by Christian psychologists Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend in 1992, *Boundaries: When to Say YES, When to Say NO, To*

*Take Control of Your Life.*<sup>57</sup>) Other key concepts in Bowen's system theory include the following:

- 2) *Triangulation*, where one or both of two people or entities in a conflict focus on pulling another person or entity in, thus shifting the tension and moving the attention away from the primary entities. (This is often characterized by efforts on one or both people to have the triangulated person take their "side");
- 3) The *Nuclear Family Emotional System*, which includes both the spoken and unspoken "rules" of how to relate, and characterized by four basic relational patterns: marital conflict, dysfunction in one spouse, impairment of one or more children, and emotional distance;
- 4) The *Family Projection Process*, a three-step process which is the primary way that parents transmit their emotional problems to their children;
- 5) The *Multigenerational Transmission Process*, where unaddressed unhealthy patterns of relating are passed on and intensified in each subsequent generation;
- 6) *Sibling Position*, where it is observed that people who grow up in the same sibling position predictably have important common characteristics;
- 7) *Emotional Cutoff*, a dysfunctional and unhealthy way of handling tension between members, and
- 8) The *Societal Emotional Process*, which is Bowen theory applied to non-family groups and social organizations.<sup>58</sup> — For our purposes here this would

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<sup>57</sup> Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries: When to Say YES, When too Say NO, To Take Control of Your Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992).

<sup>58</sup> Roberta M. Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory* (Falls Church, VA: Leading Systems Press, 2006).

certainly include the church and Christian communities, and the ways in which they can operate in a healthy or unhealthy manner.

In the Christian world, authors Jack and Judy Balswick (Jack is a professor of sociology and family development at Fuller Theological Seminary) integrate systems theory into their Christian perspective on the contemporary home as they offer a theological model for healthy family relationships. This model has four elements: covenant, grace, empowering and intimacy.<sup>59</sup>

For the business world, Peter Senge, the director of the Center for Organizational Learning at the MIT Sloan School of Management, has also applied the science of systems thinking. In his widely read book, *The Fifth Discipline*, he introduces the concept of the “Learning Organization”—one which grows and improves through feedback. The key “fifth discipline” for creating and sustaining a learning organization is systems thinking.<sup>60</sup>

A recently published book, *The Cat and the Toaster- Living System Ministry in a Technological Age* by Douglas Hall (2010) of the Emmanuel Gospel Center in Boston, is an excellent application of systems theory in the context of ministry and missions. Hall likens the complexity of systems to the difference between a cat and a toaster: One can assemble or repair a toaster relatively easily but if one tried to do the same to a cat it would be impossible, due to the great complexity and interrelatedness of its system(s). Hall defines living systems as “self-organized, highly complex, and highly interrelated collection of living

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<sup>59</sup> J.O. Balswick and J.E. Balswick, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988).

<sup>60</sup> Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of Learning Organization*. (New York: Bantam, Doubleday, Dell, 1990).

parts that work together to accomplish a high-level goal when in proper relationships to each other.”<sup>61</sup> He therefore advocates approaching ministry with a systems mentality, asserting that as the Body of Christ is also an organism and God’s work in the world is clear yet inscrutable, that we need to be thinking on a second-order level in order to be able to humbly discern God’s direction and His invitation to us to participate with Him in His work.

One helpful concept identified by Hall is the differences between two kinds of relationships and manners of communication that individuals and cultures operate by: Primary and Secondary. A Primary culture is one “where most of the people rely on personal, primary relationships and demonstrate such correlating characteristics as oral communication, learning by modeling, identifying with extended family systems, and a spiritual approach to life.” A Secondary culture is one where the majority of the people rely on impersonal, secondary relationships. They demonstrate such correlating characteristics as individualism and a preference for written communication over the spoken word. Emphasis is on the nuclear family rather than large, extended family groups. And there is a preference for formal learning rather than modeling; and a scientific rather than spiritual approach to life.<sup>62</sup> Hall asserts that people are more naturally drawn to primary culture ways of communication, which poses problems in the contemporary American context since we solidly fall into the second category. Understanding this distinction and its implications for ministry is an important systems thinking perspective which can make the difference between long-term

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<sup>61</sup> Douglas A. Hall with Judy Hall and Steve Daman, *The Cat and the Toaster: Living System Ministry in a Technological Age* (Eugene Oregon: Wipf & Stock Urban Voice Series, 2010), 58-59.

<sup>62</sup> Hall, *The Cat and the Toaster*, 20.

fruitfulness and the lack of it. This kind of systems thinking also has strong implications for how we relate to and with one another in the Body of Christ.

In the context of the church, various authors have also drawn on systems theory in their analysis of how to identify and cultivate relationally healthy congregations. Rabbi Edwin Friedman, author of *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* applied systems theory in helping to understand the processes by which congregations operate, stressing the process of dealing with issues over the content of issues, and contributing the idea of the “leverage person” as the one who has the best capacity to help bring change to the system.<sup>63</sup>

Alvin Lindgren and Norman Shawchuck in their book, *Management for your Church: How to Revitalize Your Church Potential through a Systems Approach* (1977), present a diagram for understanding systems called the Transforming System, and within that, the Transformation Process. Of five organizational theories presented, they see systems theory as being the best to meet both goals and the needs of people within a church or organization.

In this case, the church—a system which receives input and produces output—has an internal processing system composed of three interacting parts, theological-missional purposes, organization structures, and interpersonal relationships. In order to keep the church healthy and moving forward, pastors and leaders need to attend to the health and functionality of all three of these aspects. This can be done through the dual tasks of goal setting and problem-

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<sup>63</sup> Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985).

solving. For problem-solving, they present a four-step problem analysis and a detailed 6-step problem-solving process.<sup>64</sup>

### *Systems in Congregations and Community*

Author and congregational systems consultant, Peter Steinke, describes the elements of systems in the church context in terms of emotional processes. He explains that in every system there is always the constant potential for thoughtless reactivity—what Murray Bowen is credited with describing in Rabbi Edwin Friedmans's 1993 preface to Steinke's book, *How Your Church Family Works*, as free-floating anxiety<sup>65</sup>. Most of our efforts go toward trying to temper our reactivity and deal with the anxieties, problems and challenges that face us.

Other elements of the system include the concept of *separateness* (akin to Bowen's self-differentiation) balanced with *closeness*, with the need being to be emotionally close without becoming emotionally fused. Systems also have the need for *stability* in the midst of continual *change*, requiring a strengthened tolerance for emotional pain or discomfort. These are related to the two axes featured by another systems scientist, Dr. David Olson, in his *Circumplex Model* which identifies 16 types of family and couple relationships, frequently used in marital counseling and family therapy. Family systems are measured by the degree of cohesion and adaptability, with healthy functionality avoiding the

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<sup>64</sup> Alvin J. Lindgren and Norman L. Shawchuck, *Management for your Church: How to Revitalize Your Church Potential through a Systems Approach* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977).

<sup>65</sup> Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA: The Alban institute, 2006), vii.

extremes of disengagement or fusion on the cohesion axis, or rigidity and chaos on the adaptability axis.<sup>66</sup>

Churches and congregational systems can be understood in regard to their degree of adaptability and cohesion, as well. In *The Equipping Pastor: A Systems Approach to Congregational Leadership* authors Stevens and Collins identify four types of churches on a Family of Families chart, depending on where they land in the extremes. Leaders are encouraged to guide their churches away from the extremes of either chaos or rigidity, and overly independent or dependent—with the goal of being flexibly interdependent.<sup>67</sup>

Because the Body of Christ is the most common New Testament metaphor for the people of God, Steinke's use of the body analogy is particularly helpful. Just as the physical body can fall ill, so can a spiritual body of believers. Rather than allowing automatic processes—anxiety and reactivity—to run rampant church leaders serve to function as the “immune system,” to face the precipitating, external contributing conditions and the internal contributing conditions. Leaders are urged to face the challenge to grow into God's destiny for them by learning to understand how the system works, change their tendency to view problems negatively, and accept anxiety's call to change and to grow.<sup>68</sup>

In his book, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*, Steinke extends the body metaphor as he outlines ten principles of health:

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<sup>66</sup> David Olson, Candyce Smith Russell and Douglas H. Sprenkle, *Circumplex Model: Systemic Assessment and Treatment of Families* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 1989).

<sup>67</sup> Paul Stevens and Phil Collins, *The Equipping Pastor: A Systems Approach to Congregational Leadership* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1993), 79.

<sup>68</sup> Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA: The Alban institute, 2006).



- 1) Wholeness is not attainable (but can be approximated).
- 2) Illness is the necessary complement to health (i.e., It's all right to be sick, feel burdened and be down).
- 3) The body has innate healing abilities.
- 4) Agents of disease are not causes of diseases (all disease processes are enabled).
- 5) Illness is biopsychosocial.
- 6) The subtle precedes the gross. (Early detection is the best treatment.)
- 7) Everybody is different (there's no universal treatment for every organism – or congregation).
- 8) A healthy circulatory system is the keystone of health and healing. (Feedback systems promote health.)
- 9) Breathing properly is nourishing to the whole body. (The Spirit must be active.)
- 10) The brain is the largest secreting organ of the body, the HMO of the body. (The mind converts ideas into biochemical realities.)<sup>69</sup>

To understand and face the disease process the goal is for leaders and congregations to learn and grow to become immune to infectious anxiety. In that way they will be able to perceive the ways that God is leading them to change and grow, rather than be like the monkey with its hand caught in a coconut, unwilling to let go of unhealthy or unfruitful ways.<sup>70</sup> Along with the “higher medicines” of faith and prayer, congregations can gradually move from a reactive stance—requiring intervention in order to regain health—to a *prevention* stance where, like a body with a healthy immune system, it regularly and naturally identifies and repels germs and infections.<sup>71</sup> These germs and infections are not to be understood to be individual people – although people can be carriers. Rather, they come in the form of unhealthy attitudes and actions. As Ephesians 6:12 reminds us, “Our battle is not against flesh and blood....”

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<sup>69</sup> Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), 15-16.

<sup>70</sup> Steinke, *Healthy Congregations*, 73.

<sup>71</sup> Steinke, *Healthy Congregations*, 98-101.

## Addressing Conflict in the Family of God

Prevention of conflict is a good and appropriate goal for congregations, communities and individuals. Yet, just as in order for a body to be strong and fit it requires training and exercise, addressing conflict and its prevention can only be arrived at and sustained through training and exercise, as well. It is through understanding, time, thought, prayer and practice that believers and the Body of Christ can become strong and fit, bearing fruit to accomplish God's purposes. And just like the strength of a team depends on the strength of individual players, so the Body of Christ must have each of its individual members strengthened in the knowledge and exercise of the truth.

### *For Individuals*

Change in a system requires change in individuals. And correspondingly, change in individuals contributes to change in the system. Every believer must be taught and helped to understand and apply biblical principles of conflict engagement and resolution. As a result the whole Body of Christ will be strengthened and better fit for service in glorifying God.

At the most foundational level is the individual. As Christians the individual's most fundamental relationship is between them and the Creator. When an individual is at peace with God, then they can be at peace with themselves—and ultimately with others. In a fallen world, however, no one can expect complete peace and harmony; in fact, they can expect quite the opposite.

It is with these thoughts that we look more closely at addressing conflict on an individual level, and to this end one of the most comprehensive books

written in this subject from a Christian perspective is *The Peacemaker* written by Ken Sande, lawyer and president of Peacemaker Ministries. Here Sande presents a biblically based framework for developing peacemaking churches, beginning with teaching individuals how to deal with conflict.

To summarize or encapsulate his concepts Sande offers a diagram called The Slippery Slope of Conflict<sup>72</sup> where he outlines the spectrum of 12 possible responses to conflict, broken into three categories (see diagram below). The first category on the far left of the slope is that of escape or “peace faking” responses which include denial, flight or the ultimate escape response, suicide. On the other end of the spectrum on the right are three attack, or “peace breaking” responses, including assault (verbal or physical), litigation or the ultimate attack response, murder. Escape or attack responses would relate to Steinke’s automatic processes where emotions of fear or anger would take control. While these responses are natural, when Christians face conflict they are called to draw on God’s resources, wisdom and power to respond in ways that lead to peacemaking. For those who are fearful this takes courage, for those who are angry this takes humility and self-restraint—both of which require the help of the Holy Spirit.

The focus of the book is on the middle six peacemaking responses —the only biblical options for believers. They include three individual responses: to Overlook an offense, Reconciliation and Negotiation, and three assisted responses: Mediation, Arbitration and Accountability.

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<sup>72</sup> Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 22.

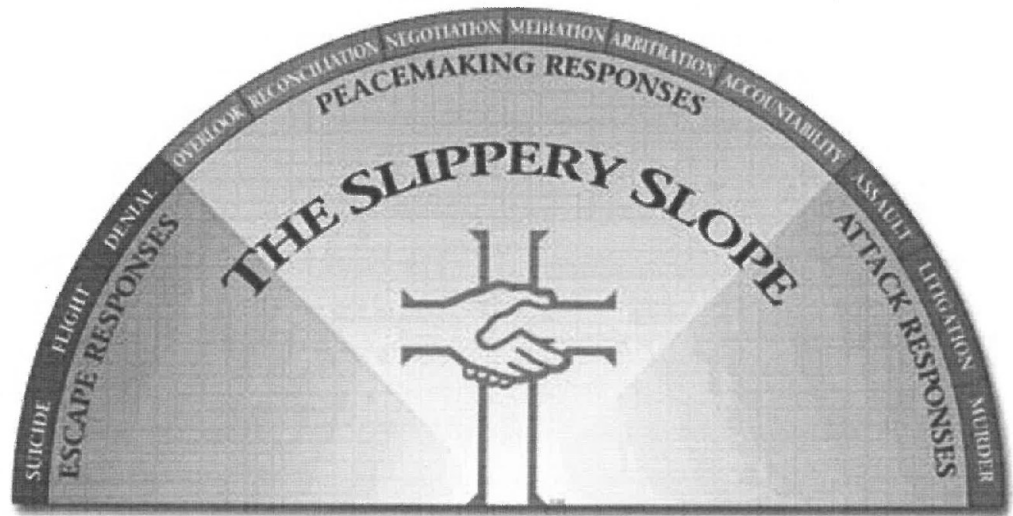


Figure 3-1: The Slippery Slope

Sande emphasizes the importance of having an appropriate and positive mindset toward conflict. This is the first step. Understanding that conflict is inevitable, it is better to see conflict instead as an opportunity to glorify God by trusting, obeying, imitating and bearing witness to Him as the conflict is addressed or managed. “As you live out the gospel and make the Lord’s priorities your priorities, you can turn every conflict into a stepping stone to a closer relationship with God and a more fulfilling and fruitful Christian life.”<sup>73</sup> God is a redemptive God and desires to turn all things to good for those who love Him. He is able to make bad things even better than before they began (Romans 8:28).

The second step to addressing conflict is to look inward. We must look to see what contribution we are making to a problem, whether intentional or unintentional, in either attitude or action (Luke 6:42; Matthew 7:4-5). We need to

<sup>73</sup> Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 41.

be able to discern the truth about ourselves as well as to avoid premature or improper correction of others. Here we are faced with the options of repenting and changing our attitude, moving forward to seeking reconciliation or to simply overlook the perceived offense. If we find *ourselves* to be in the wrong, Sande offers seven “A’s” of confession:

The Seven A’s of Confession:

- 1) Address everyone Involved
- 2) Avoid “if,” “but” and “maybe” in regard to what you did or said
- 3) Admit specifically what you did wrong
- 4) Acknowledge the hurt done to the other person
- 5) Accept the consequences
- 6) Alter your behavior
- 7) Ask for forgiveness (and allow time)<sup>74</sup>

The third step is to seek to “gently restore” the person who is in error. This requires a willingness and commitment to face issues and to “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15). Following the process of Matthew 18:15-17, the aim of this step is to pursue reconciliation and restoration. This assumes that it has been determined that the problem is too serious to overlook by being either dishonoring to God, damaging to your relationship, hurting others or hurting the offender.<sup>75</sup> This is the time to listen well and to clarify facts and attitudes—a process which often leads to quick resolution if it is discovered that differences have actually been a result of simple misunderstandings.

If however, the offender is truly in the wrong and is unwilling to listen it could be time for mediated or assisted discussion with the help of a “reconciler.” If this fails then the instructions in verse 17 are to be implemented: tell it to the

<sup>74</sup> Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 127-132.

<sup>75</sup> Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 150.

church, and if still no repentance, to treat the person ‘as an unbeliever’ —a stance which Sande points out should not be characterized by condemnation and censure, but instead seeking to share the gospel with that person in every way and at every time possible.

In step four, Sande stresses that if a person does repent—and even if they do not—it is important and necessary to learn to forgive, lest we drink the poison of unforgiveness. We are to forgive as God forgave us. Forgiveness is neither a feeling, nor forgetting, nor excusing, but a decision. Sande lists four promises made to another that should be implicit in the act of forgiving:

1. “I will not dwell on this incident”
2. “I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you.”
3. “I will not talk to others about this incident.”
4. “I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.”<sup>76</sup>

He ends his chapters with a reminder that even when others reject us and our efforts at peacemaking and reconciliation—even to the point of persecution—we must still seek to obey and glorify God. This can be done by “overcoming evil with good” (Rom 12:21) by controlling our tongue, seeking godly advisors, keeping doing what is right, recognizing our limits, and using the “ultimate weapon” of love.<sup>77</sup>

Sande’s book has been translated into eleven different languages is being used in hundreds of churches to teach peacemaking principles to individuals, small groups and congregations in the United States and around the world. This kind of teaching is foundational in renewing the minds of believers and helping

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<sup>76</sup> Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 209.

<sup>77</sup> Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 247-256.

them to better live and reflect the Kingdom of God through healthy relationships—something of which the world and the church are in serious need. As individuals learn and apply peacemaking principles, families, congregations and communities of faith will be able to become “cultures of peace.”

### *For Pastors and Leaders*

Pastors and church leaders are key to discipling relationally healthy believers and growing healthy congregations. As people and congregations work through conflicts—thus enabling them to obtain a deepening experience of *koinonia*—there are many good resources that they can draw on for perspective and support.

First, leaders must determine how they want to face problems. In his book *Overcoming Organizational Defenses*, Chris Argyris presents two models of leadership and management. The first is the Control Model, characterized by seeking short-term rewards, crisis orientation, quick-fix and covert evaluation. Those who operate in this mode seek to exercise unilateral control and tend toward forcing win-lose scenarios. In addition no negative feelings are allowed to be expressed.<sup>78</sup> The motivation to control eclipses seeking to meet the needs of both the people and the organization.

The second management model is the Commitment Model. This is characterized by seeking long-term rewards, problem-solving before crises arise, and overt evaluation, with the major responsibility for success being placed not

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<sup>78</sup> Chris Argyris, *Overcoming Organizational Defenses: Facilitating Organizational Learning* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 25.

on the leader(s) but shared by the systems and groups. When faced with defensiveness within the organization Argyris advocates remembering and choosing what kind of organization (or congregation/community) they want to be. At this time it is good to remember Lindgren and Shawchuck's transformation process and to consider assessing and caring for needs within the three interacting parts, theological-missional purposes, organizational structures, and interpersonal relationships.

Expanding on the idea of considering various approaches to addressing problems, Georg Parsons and Speed Leas present three related approaches, the Difficult-People Approach, the Problem-Solving Approach and the Systems Approach. While there is a time and place to address difficult people and problems, since the causes of problems are almost always multiple, the systems approach is most effective. The authors provide continuing helpful systems perspective by their emphasis on observing the reactive patterns (non-conscious agreements) that people have about how they are supposed or expected to act and get along. Leaders can avoid extremes of chaos and overcontrol in their responses and learn to live in the "creative tension" of healthy dialog and moving toward healthy balance in critical areas of strategy, authority, process, leadership, relatedness and learning.<sup>79</sup>

Michael Armour and Don Browning identify eight thinking or value systems by which individuals and/or groups operate. These are driven by various values and beliefs they have in regard to "existence issues," such as assumptions and

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<sup>79</sup> Georg Parsons, and Speed B. Leas, *The Manual: Understanding Your Congregation as a System* (Bethesda: The Alban Institute, 1993).



attitudes about life as well as what they believe will bring security and significance. (Their detailed chart of these eight may be found in Appendix C.) Different people are drawn to different styles based on personality, presuppositions, circumstances and experiences. “Systems-sensitive leaders” need to understand these styles and embrace them as part of the diversity of the church, and then act as advocates for and allies with the people when the needs and concerns of the various styles need to be integrated into healthy and appropriate responses.<sup>80</sup>

Peter Steinke in a more recent book, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What*, writes about the importance of the manner in which a leader conducts him/herself in the midst of conflict. In order to have a helpful, non-anxious presence, leaders must make sure that they are differentiated by being grounded in their sense of identity and their limits. They enforce healthy boundaries in themselves and in others, yet do not cut themselves off emotionally as they join in the process of working issues through. They seek to avoid extremes of “peace-mongering”—forcing a premature and false resolution, wrong thinking about conflict (i.e. seeing it in negative terms), and refusing to neglect or deny that there are issues that need to be faced.<sup>81</sup>

Author Ron Susek uses the metaphor of a “firestorm” to illustrate the process and effect of out of control conflict. Just as a fire begins small but then

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<sup>80</sup> Michael P. Armour and Don Browning, *Systems-Sensitive Leadership: Empowering Diversity without Polarizing the Church* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Co., 2000).

<sup>81</sup> Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006).

quickly rages out of control, leaving only burnt embers in the end, so he describes six phases of the life cycle of a firestorm of conflict.

Phase 1: *Sparks*. Characterized by flare-ups of conflict.

Phase 2: *Sparks Igniting a Firestorm*. Unaddressed conflicts and those left discontented draw others into the conflict.

Phase 3: *Firestorm in Full Fury*. Where the sparks fully merge and burn out of control. There is an almost overnight collapse of reason, negotiation, tolerance, love or forgiveness. Spiritual solutions are seldom effective past this stage. Susek believes that there is only about a 30-90 days window in which to effectively address issues before a full firestorm breaks out. He quotes Dr. Edward Peirce in saying that 50% of pastors harmed at this point do not return to the ministry.<sup>82</sup>

Phase 4: *Consuming Winds*. Referring to how Satan fans the flames of conflict.

Phase 5: *The Final Burn*. Where the institution unravels. (This would also be true for a family or a community.)

Phase 6: *Rebuilding on Burnt Timbers*. Though much has been lost, there will be a need for repentance, restitution and reconciliation.

The causes of conflict come from three different directions—from the pastor, from individuals and/or from problems in the system.

Pastors must be willing to first listen to legitimate complaints and consider where they may be falling short or in the wrong. Susek sees four “pillars” which

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<sup>82</sup> Ron Susek, *Firestorm: Preventing and Overcoming Church Conflicts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 44-45.

pastors are expected to focus on and keep strong—each of them corresponding to four basic needs of the people. These pillars are not gifts, qualities or skills but are responsibilities which need to be met in relatively equal balance. He identifies them using the acrostic “TRIM”: Truth, Relationship, Integrity and Mission. While it is natural to hide behind a strong pillar, pastors must be willing to acknowledge where they are weak in their ministry in any of these four areas and humbly seek to strengthen themselves.

In regard to individuals Susek confirms that the way people learned to relate to their natural family becomes the way that they relate to their spiritual family. Put alternately, he states that people are “either duplicating or despising [their] negative experiences.”<sup>83</sup> When chronic or volatile problems originate from individuals and they seek to use destructive means to accomplish their purposes, they are driven by either destructive family backgrounds or unsolved psycho-social needs. Negative backgrounds might include abuse, parent issues, divorce, rejection, or enmeshment. Unmet needs might be those for acceptance, achievement, value or safety. These people need to be ministered to, but not allowed to manipulate or infect others.

Systemic problems could include, triangulation, wounded people wounding others, multiple staff and corresponding hidden agendas, and empire-building rather than kingdom- building attitudes.<sup>84</sup>

Susek presents 6 different “steps” that pastors can take to respond to a firestorm, as well as actions which church leaders can take—including employing

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<sup>83</sup> Susek, *Firestorm*, 83.

<sup>84</sup> Susek, *Firestorm*, chapter 9.

consultants to help the church work through the process or aftermath of a firestorm.

At the conclusion of his book, Susek wisely exhorts pastors and leaders by saying, “No one is ever called by God to be a leader, only a follower. And the better that one follows, the better one leads.”<sup>85</sup> This is also a key reminder to those who seek to have a deeper quality experience of community in the Body of Christ. The degree to which one seeks to follow and obey God individually in the blessings—and especially conflicts—encountered while seeking to live together as God’s people, will be the degree to which their church or community will actually be able to more fully apprehend a quality experience of *koinonia*. In fact, working through conflict is a necessary and very authentic aspect of true Christian community.

Now that we have looked at a history of community and renewal, we will seek to investigate and learn from those who are similarly seeking to live together as God’s children in society today. What can we learn from their experiences and reflections which can help others in the Body of Christ at large – and particularly the local church – to move deeper into the authenticity and power of our identity? What lessons have they learned to both enhance and to remove barriers from living into the daily reality of our identity as God’s children, Christ’s body in this world?

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<sup>85</sup> Susek, *Firestorm*, 167-168.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH PROJECT — LESSONS FROM INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES

Now that we have looked at a history of community and renewal up through the present day, we will seek to learn from some of those who are similarly seeking to live together as God's children in our society now. By listening to their experiences and reflections we hope to gain insights into how "the rest of us" in the Body of Christ—and particularly the local church—can move deeper in our apprehension of the authenticity and power of our identity as God's children together. By exploring the lessons they have learned we hope to discover steps that we may take to both enhance and/or to remove barriers from living into the fullness of our identity as Christ's body in our postmodern world.

As discussed in chapter one, North American society has become increasingly individualistic, shallow and impersonal. We face the breakdown of the family, disintegration of neighborhoods, the isolating effects of technology, and increasing violence at home, school and in the workplace. Believers have not been immune to these or their effects. Living amidst such increasing fragmentation and loneliness a desire has been awakened in many believers to seek to experience or re-apprehend closeness and sense of community with one another as the Body of Christ. Inspired by the scriptures, the example of the New Testament church and saints throughout history, many are banding together in co-housed, intentional Christian living communities. According to Lon Sherritt, the founder of the Green House Community, an intentional Christian community in the Boston area (and an interviewee in this project), it's estimated that ten years

ago—around 2001—there were only a small handful of such communities in the Boston area; now there are close to 100.

Through a series of interviews of individuals living in or having lived in these communities, we seek to identify and highlight specific elements and principles which would be deemed to be most helpful, informative and transferrable to “average” believers in our churches. Although most evangelical believers may not or cannot physically live together, the need to more fully experience *koinonia* as a natural part of their participation in the Body of Christ is just as strong. Given the fragmentation and pressures of modern society, it is perhaps even stronger.

### The Communities

The interviews in this research project were conducted at various dates in the years of 2004, 2010 and 2011. Interviews were conducted with groups of individuals who are members of five different intentional Christian communities in the Boston, MA area: Four members of *The Community of Jesus*, a Benedictine ecumenical monastic community on Cape Cod in 2004; six members of the interdenominational *Green House* community in Jamaica Plain in 2010; four members of the interdenominational *Mill Street House* community in Beverly in 2011; three members of the interdenominational *Nightingale Community* in Dorchester in 2011, and six members of the “*Hall Hotel*” community (informally connected with the Emmanuel Gospel Center) in Boston’s South End in 2011.

Secondary interviews were taken of four individuals who had previously been involved in intentional Christian communities, all of them in 2004: Martha

G.,<sup>1</sup> an Episcopal priest who spent six months in an ecumenical contemplative order in Switzerland, a Taizé community for women named *La Committee de Grande Champs*; Brother D.,<sup>2</sup> a monk with the *Society of St. John the Evangelist*, an Episcopal monastic order; Carolyn B.,<sup>3</sup> who grew up in a village in North Carolina comprised entirely of families with fathers employed by the same company and worshipping in its village church; and Catherine H.,<sup>4</sup> who was a lay member of the *Society of Aiden and Hilda*, a worldwide fellowship based on Lindesfarne Island in England which draws inspiration from the Celtic saints.<sup>5</sup> Although these secondary interviews were conducted in a different time and manner than the primary ones, some of their responses helped support and broaden insights gleaned from the primary interviews. Names of all interviewees, both individually and in groups, were shortened to first name and last initial for purposes of confidentiality.

### The Questions and Interviews

A total of twenty-seven people were interviewed. The individuals and groups were asked the following set of questions:

- 1) How did you come to be involved in intentional community?
- 2) Is there any particular Rule, guidelines and/or rhythm that you follow in your community in regard to worship and/or community life?

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<sup>1</sup> Martha G., interviewed by author, Hamilton, MA, April 5, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Brother D., interviewed by author, Newbury, MA, April 23, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Carolyn B., interviewed by author via e-mail, May 18, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Catherine H., interviewed by author, Ipswich, MA, March 15, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> The Community of Aiden and Hilda, "About the Community."  
[http://www.aidanandhilda.org.uk/public\\_html/web/about-main.php](http://www.aidanandhilda.org.uk/public_html/web/about-main.php) (accessed April 2, 2012).

- 3) Are there any specific scriptures you particularly look to?
- 4) What would you describe as the essence of or your definition of *community*? Can you recount any particular experiences in your community life that embodied this for you?
- 5) What would you say most threatens or detracts from your experience of genuine community?
- 6) How do you or have you dealt with conflict in the community? Do you have a plan or guidelines for such instances?
- 7) What would you say is the greatest lesson or lessons you've personally learned in your time being here in the community?
- 8) What principles, perspectives and/or words of advice would you want to pass on to the church based on your experience that you think would help "the rest of us" in pursuing authentic community together?

The interviews were transcribed and each category was summarized. Communities' and individuals' summaries were then compared with one another and differences and similarities highlighted.

It should be noted that while each interview involved answering the same questions, no two interviews were exactly alike. Apart from the interviews obviously involving different individuals, each group itself was also different. As would be expected, often the first response to a given question set the theme, tone or emphasis for the group in answering that question – and sometimes



subsequent ones. In that sense each group moved in and through different themes both as individuals and together.

Frequently the first person to answer a given question would appear to influence the responses of the others – at least for a while – with subsequent responses tending to mirror that of the first respondent. Some groups were able to branch out beyond the first responses on some questions and share more diversity in answers; yet just as often, subsequent responses were ones which reinforced or clarified the initial idea. Whether this reflected a group consensus simply introduced by the first responder, or whether it reflected any lack of personal reflectiveness on the part of the individuals in the group it is difficult to know and impossible to judge. Nevertheless, keeping these dynamics in mind, the interviewer was able to get both a feeling of the group as a whole as well as discern individual perspectives and responses.

### *Motivations*

The question of how individuals became involved in intentional Christian community (question #1) sought to discern individuals' actual motivation to organize, participate or join the intentional community of which they were or are a part. While all community members interviewed in one way or another shared the belief that scripture supported and encouraged close and intertwined lives in the Body of Christ, there were several other major motivating factors revealed in the interviews.

### Simple economics

A very common motivator, expressed most often by the youngest or younger members of the intentional communities had to do with the fact that all of the communities interviewed and of which they were a part, charged significantly less monthly rent than they would find in regular housing situations. Houses in four of the five communities were owned by founders or members of that community, and as such, they were able to choose to charge a lower or even drastically reduced rent in exchange for renter's commitment to sincere and devoted involvement in the community and to its values and mission. While young members across the board expressed a solid commitment to the community and affirmed its ongoing positive influence in their lives, the majority of them confessed that the initial draw of the community was the benefit that the reduced rent would be in helping them to make ends meet. In other words, the low rent and community mission became an irresistible combination.

The youngest members of communities are the underage children who had no choice in the matter (there were a total of nine between all of the communities interviewed). Carolyn B. was the only adult interviewed who grew up as a child in a community and who was able to reflect on and communicate meaningfully about her experience.

### Previous exposure or involvement

Many interviewees, in particular all of the founders of the various communities, described how they were *motivated by what they saw or heard*

*when first visiting or experiencing fellowship in their own other intentional communities.* Mako and Ming N.,<sup>6</sup> founders of the 3-house Nightingale Community in Dorchester, describe how they both had observed and participated in activities with friends who were members of various intentional Christian communities over the years in other parts of the country. In commenting about one Japanese-American community he was affiliated with, Mako stated, “They lived together and it was really fun going over there. Because there was always somebody to talk to, and they had a big impact on their neighborhood.” When asked if the goal of that community was to reach the neighborhood or more to “live Christianly” (the interviewer’s term) Mako replied, “Both.”

Beth M. and Mark D.,<sup>7</sup> a married couple who are founders of the 3-living-unit (triple-decker) Mill Street House Community in Beverly stated that, as Anglicans, for many years they had been interested and involved in monastic worship and neo-monasticism. They had taken a year off from pastoral ministry (Beth is an ordained priest) and visited various neo-monastic communities in the Eastern part of the U.S. as well as in France.<sup>8</sup> Mark said, “Our take away from that was...that it was attractive to see Christians not forsaking the church by any means but seeking to live in peace and harmony with each other and with the surrounding community.” And then overseas “we did some missions work and had a chance to live in we say, more *permeable* lives – lives where you don’t get your own way as much as you would like. We found that to be good for us.”

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<sup>6</sup> Mako and Ming N., interviewed by author, Dorchester, MA, March 21, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Beth M. & Mark D., interviewed by author, Beverly, MA, February 2, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> *Eau Vive* [living water] in France, *Michlot in Parl*, South Africa, *Vineyard Central* in Cincinnati OH, and *The Landing Place* in Columbus, OH.

While Brian and Cathi C.,<sup>9</sup> current leaders or “hosts” of “The Hall Hotel” in Boston’s South End inherited the legacy of previous founders, the Halls, their involvement in intentional community has lasted for close to 27 years – the majority of their married lives. They first became involved for simple, economic reasons when they were in college in Idaho when they rented a low-rent ranch house with another couple. After a few years in this very positive co-housing situation, they found that they were disposed to move into another, more intentional Christian community in the area associated with an itinerant evangelistic music ministry. The focus of those in the community of this group of apartment buildings was Christian discipleship and it was there that Brian says the vision for the power of intentional community to profoundly change lives really took hold in him. It was there that they began to develop more of an actual conviction about intentional community being a preferable lifestyle for Christians whenever possible or feasible.

#### Perceived or awakened sense of inner need

Along with the previous or initial exposure, other interviewees were able to identify an experience of profound, inner personal and spiritual nourishment almost immediately recognized upon interaction and experiencing the values and atmosphere of the community. Sister G.<sup>10</sup> of the 260-member Community of Jesus on Cape Cod said, “I simply saw the light in people’s faces [when

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<sup>9</sup> Brian and Cathi C., interviewed by author, Boston, MA, March 3, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Sister G., interviewed by author, Orleans, MA, April 3, 2004.

attending an initial Bible study] and I wanted that.” Barbara M.<sup>11</sup> of the same community said, “The first thing that caught my attention immediately was when [the Bible study leaders] taught from the scriptures they taught practical, everyday how you get along with each other, how you put into practice what is in the Bible when you’re disputing over this or over that. It was so down-to-earth and so able to touch the things that were below the surface than most people in my crowd who just talked about surface things: ‘Oh you’re a Christian; you need to be this way.’ Well I knew I wasn’t that way; there was a discrepancy in my life and what they were teaching helped meet that discrepancy with hope that something could change. Not just the *what*, but the *how*.”

Brother B.<sup>12</sup> of the same community said, “It was a drawing, much as Sister G. was saying. I could see the light in people’s eyes and I wanted that. I believe at the same time that the Holy Spirit was also inspiring me to come and to be a part of this place, with the understanding that I had a calling here. But I didn’t know that when I first started coming for retreat back in 1972. There was something here that I wanted, but I didn’t know what it was. People were living their lives transparently in front of me. [And I wasn’t] that kind of person! But there’s something here that I needed.”

Jessica K.<sup>13</sup> of the 3-household Green House Community in Jamaica Plain said, “Just seeing the importance of supporting each other. I was already thinking in terms of spiritual support and emotional support and things like that [when I came here, too] but [for example] there are people here who know more about

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<sup>11</sup> Barbara M., interviewed by author, Orleans, MA, April 3, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Brother B., interviewed by author, Orleans, MA, April 3, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Jessica K., interviewed by author, Jamaica Plain, MA, October 25, 2010.

computers than I do....If there's a question that I have there is usually someone who can help me or point me in the right direction. I guess there's things I can help offer people, too...It seems like this is the way that we were meant to live."

Jin Min L.,<sup>14</sup> a *de facto* member of the Hall Hotel community (she has meals and spends many evenings there but has her own apartment elsewhere) expressed her sense of need growing up in an immigrant family. "I'm a 1.5 generation immigrant, and my parents weren't really connected with our neighbors, they kept to themselves mostly....Because of my parents' different culture, my friends' parents – they didn't really know each other. So I think there's a part of me when it comes to home life is that I'm very private." She went on to express that in contrast feel she needs and desires to experience knowing and being known in a way that she wasn't able to be growing up. Along with that came a sense of relief: "I think a lot of times I feel I need to take care of myself and be strong, and there are moments [here] when I feel really cared for. And I may have been working too much, and they care for my well-being in ways that make me feel like I don't have to take care of myself all of the time."

#### Conviction or inner sense of divine call

While Brother B. and Jessica K. would be examples of a sense of conviction and experience developing together to lead them commit themselves to an intentional community, Lon S.,<sup>15</sup> the founder of the Green House Community described his experience otherwise. In his words, "It wasn't

<sup>14</sup> Jin Min L., interviewed by author, Boston, MA, March 3, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Lon S., interviewed by author, Jamaica Plain, MA, October 25, 2010.

something like ‘Oh gee, my wish is to do this.’ It was more the opposite; it was a continual confrontation in our prayer time in the hearts of me and a friend of mine. We were praying and for quite a while...ten years ago now...and we felt confronted that God was saying to us that unless you figure out how to be involved in authentic Christian community, you’re not going to make any dent for the Kingdom in Boston. It was that kind of a strong message.” He added chuckling, “—and we’re not even communitarians!”

It’s interesting to note that four out of the five community founders interviewed communicated that their motivation to form intentional communities came from a strong sense of both objectively biblical<sup>16</sup> and subjective, spiritual impressions. (It is not known about the founders of the Community of Jesus since one is deceased and the other, the current prioress at the time of the interviews, was not among those interviewed.)

#### Seriousness of shared devotion

The most common shared motivator of individuals choosing to live in intentional community was the overwhelming value that they placed on being able to share life with others perceived to have an equal level of commitment to following Jesus Christ in all aspects of life. This could be expressed in community life in various ways – from organized rhythms of community worship, fellowship and prayer to coordinated efforts at local community outreach—or a combination of both.

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<sup>16</sup> Specific scriptures listed in following section.

Brother D. of the Society of St. John the Evangelist, an Episcopalian monastic order, said he was drawn to the monastic community by a sense of “everyone opting in.” He was on a search to find a group of safe, healthy peers with a shared, primary focus.

Beth M., of the Mill Street House, commented, “I had spent the past ten or twelve years as an ordained person, mostly ministering to a large, diffuse group of people with moderate commitment, and [was] trying to get them to sort of kick their Christian commitment up a notch and come to church more frequently than before. And we came away with the image that maybe for the second half of active ministry we might be called to [work with] a much smaller group of people with higher commitment who we were forming not to come in but to go out [to minister].”

Martin S.,<sup>17</sup> a member of the Community of Jesus and also an ordained Episcopal clergyman, described his experience: “[Here] there was an element of solid food that attracted me. I wanted what was happening here. [They were] taking the idea of following Christ [as a given] and saying that wasn’t always easy. There was a certain amount of dying involved. And they would talk about the way of the cross. For me that wasn’t a negative thing. It explained to me why there was a certain amount of pain and suffering involved [in following Jesus]. It’s not all skipping along. It’s trying sometimes. And [it’s] work. So...there was this notion that ‘I am taking my following of Christ seriously. Not myself more seriously but my following of Christ.’ I found that very attractive, so we started to come and kept coming.”

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<sup>17</sup> Martin S., interviewed by author, Orleans, MA, April 3, 2004.



### *Structure & Rule*

The second question regarding the rule of life had to do with specific practices that each community has or may have in relation to their shared lives and/or mission. In regard to formal fellowship times, all five of the communities share evening meals at least once a week. In relation to worship, communities ranged from highly structured Benedictine-inspired worship complete with at least four daily offices of prayer (Community of Jesus, Society of St. John the Evangelist-SSJE, Society of Aiden and Hilda) to more loosely regimented community practices with only the once weekly meal and house meeting required (Green House, Hall Hotel). Moderately structured communities included the Mill Street House which has a room set aside as a chapel reserved for community Morning Prayer and Compline, and the Nightingale Community which has weekly dinners as well as monthly community meetings in the neighborhood designed for outreach.

While all of the members of the communities affirmed that part of their purpose was to share and live out the same core values of “living together Christianly” (the interviewer’s term) only three of the five of the community groups interviewed had an actual written rule of life or articulated list of their community’s core values or relational expectations. Both the Community of Jesus<sup>18</sup> and the SSJE<sup>19</sup> have detailed, written publications of their rules of life (See Appendix D). The Mill Street House and the Nightingale Community have one-page documents

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<sup>18</sup> *The Rule of Life of the Community of Jesus*, Principles and Procedures, Appendices; Adopted by Chapter, March 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Society of Saint John the Evangelist, “Rule of the Society of St. John the Evangelist,” <http://www.ssje.org/fsjrle.html> (accessed April 2, 2012).

outlining their values (See appendix F & E respectively), with the former based on a modified version of the local seminary's community life statement<sup>20</sup> and the latter comprised of eight core values having been articulated and compiled over time by the earliest members of the community. Only the Green House Community and the Hall Hotel had nothing in writing at the time of interviewing. (The Green House interviewees said that they call themselves "the Seinfeld Community" explaining their purpose as a community as being, as the sitcom *Seinfeld*, "about nothing." Although amusing, this is not actually the case as will be evident in later sections.)

Brian C. of the Hall Hotel reflected on the issue of articulated rules or guidelines: "To contrast [our current community] with past experiences, this is much smaller and [has] much better-behaved people generally. In the past, yes, when it's been larger and people have had same pretty significant issues, very obvious issues that they're dealing with, we've had to write things down and had people sign almost like a covenant where they agree to it.... We're definitely low-structure [here]. But we can [afford to] do that since we're smaller. If we were back in a place where we had 35 people then I would definitely ratchet up the structure and the written things."

Specific community practices are worthy of note. On community dinner nights the Green House periodically has what they call the "Chair of Blessing" after the meal where one person is focused on – the one seated in the chair of blessing. They tell their story and/or talk about what's going on in their life and

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<sup>20</sup> Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, "Community Life Statement," [http://www.gordonconwell.edu/visitors/community\\_life\\_statement](http://www.gordonconwell.edu/visitors/community_life_statement) (accessed April 2, 2012).

their prayer needs. Mill Street House has a similar practice where newcomers to the community share their spiritual story with the community and where each member of the community shares theirs in turn, as well. (The whole process takes place over the course of a few weeks.) At the Hall Hotel, Cathi C. explained that their weekly times together "...[Do] include prayer, and listening—really listening. We have a little imaginary 'talking stick' that we pass around and then prayer for each other [based on] what we sense is going on, or a need."

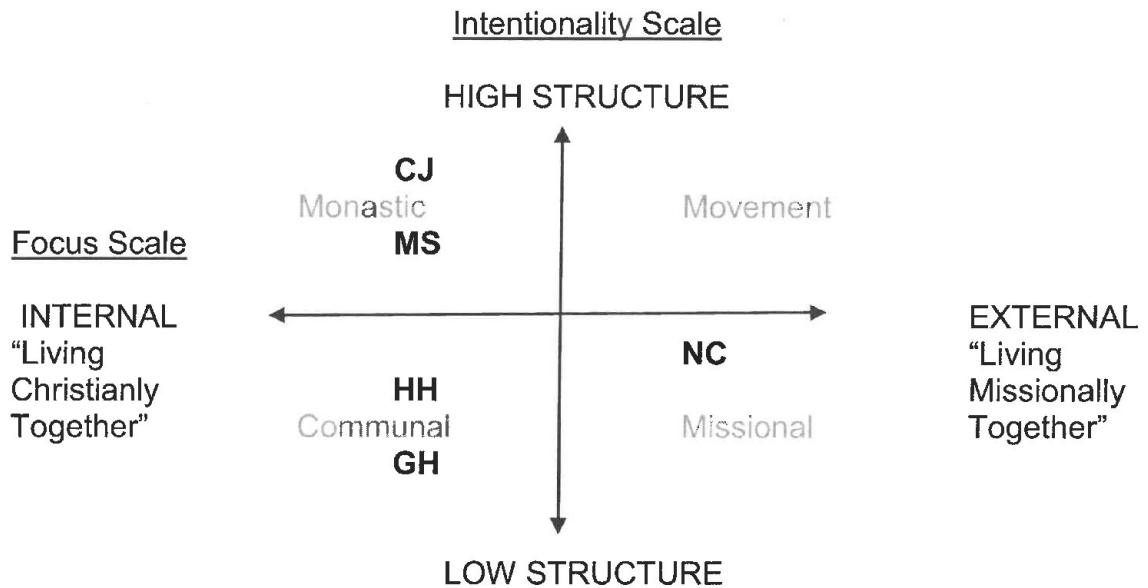
Catherine H. from the Society of Aiden and Hilda related, "There are several universal things: every person must have a spiritual director, and they are supposed to take the ten principles of the Rule of Life and work on it with their spiritual director. And to work out a peaceable supported way of working it out—not making it into a law. Memorizing scripture was a part of it, choosing when one was going to pray, and Bible reading every day. Also taking time alone with God – retreat time. [And] if possible meeting with the Community [in Lindesfarne] at least once a year."

### The Intentionality Scale

After learning about the degree and kind of structure of each community, distinctions were identified in regard to each community's primary philosophical and operational focus. The following scale was conceived to illustrate where they lie in relation to each other. In the figure below the horizontal axis shows the degree of *focus* (determined by the interviewer) that a community has on the internal relationships versus more of an external, missional focus, reflected on

the right. The further a community – in either its philosophy or practice – falls to the left of the spectrum the more they express a tendency to emphasize and/or see themselves as existing primarily for the purpose of the cultivation of interpersonal relationships within their intentional community, i.e. “living Christianly together.” The further to the right of the horizontal spectrum, the greater or stronger their stated or operational emphasis on external relationships by seeking to minister to the surrounding community, i.e. “living missionally together.”

The vertical axis measures the level or degree of *structure* the communities are stated or perceived to have. Communities that land in the more highly structured end of the spectrum are the ones which have more clearly articulated community rules and/or formal rhythms of worship and/or fellowship. Those on the lower end of the spectrum would tend to not have official, written rules and might not even have any regular community gatherings or meetings. (It is worthy of note that none of the interviewed communities fit this description. As mentioned before, all had at least one weekly or monthly community meal/gathering.)



CJ = Community of Jesus (high structure, strong internal focus).  
 MS = Mill Street House (moderately high structure, moderate external focus)  
 NC = Nightingale Community (moderate structure, strong external focus)  
 HH = Hall Hotel (low structure, internal focus)  
 GH = Green House (low structure, strong internal focus)

Figure 4-1: The Intentionality Scale

It should be noted that the recorded responses of individual members of each community group were all slightly different from one another, even while the philosophy and operation of the group as a whole fell into one general quadrant area. It should also be noted that the determination of the quadrants within the individual communities were deemed by the researcher to fall, were intended to be a general rather than a comprehensive representation. Further development of this concept and chart could result in the creation of a useful tool to help communities clarify their corporate goals and values as well as their individual orientations within the same. However, this is not within the purview of this paper.

### *Guiding Scriptures*

In addition to the question about structure interviewees were asked to share any specific scriptures which they could say they consciously used or unconsciously believed they drew on to guide them. Answers fell into three categories: scriptures having to do with community/relational life, with need and degree of spiritual commitment, and with missional focus.

A question could be raised as to whether the scriptures shared by each community were more reflective of the groups or the individuals' orientations. As mentioned, there did seem to be a correlation between answers in a given community. It should be noted that it seems that the perspective of the founders or leaders strongly influences the perspectives of the members – or else a community draws members of similar perspectives or orientations (a chicken or egg situation). But at the same time, since not every person referenced the same scripture, it is fair to say that responses most likely both built and reflected an understanding of a consensus among the members of the communities, which gives each community its own, unique “thumbprint.”

The written *Rule of the Community of Jesus* as well as *The Rule of St. John the Evangelist* are replete with scripture covering all three areas mentioned above: community/relational, spiritual commitment and missional focus. In the interview, individuals from the Community of Jesus mentioned and/or alluded to the following scriptures.

In regard to community/relational life: James 5:16 (“Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed.”); Ephesians 4:15

("instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."); Colossians 3:9-10 ("Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."); Romans 12:15 ("Weep with those who weep; rejoice with those who rejoice" NASB); and the family of God metaphor for believers found in such scriptures as 1 Peter 2:17 and 1 Thess. 4:10. In regard to being willing to face potential conflict, 1 John 1:7: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

In regard to degree of spiritual commitment: The Way of the Cross as outlined in Mark 8:34 and Luke 14:27 ("Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me," and "...anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."); Ephesians 4:22-24 ("You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."); Matthew 16:24; "(Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.") And finally, a "hybrid" verse covering life together, commitment and mission: Philippians 2:2 ("Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.")

Carolyn B., raised in a company village and still a member of the village church, emphasized Deuteronomy 6:6-9: "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." Although the community is no longer exclusively power company employee families, she wants to pass on to her children and grandchildren the values she learned from living in the community.

The Mill Street House community embodies a fairly strong monastic and somewhat missional focus. In their informational sheet for new and potential members (see Appendix C) they describe themselves as practicing "Isaiah 58" ministry or what they call "missional neighboring." Specifically verses 6-8: "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"

The Nightingale Community expressed the strongest emphasis on missional focus. Even greater than the purpose of "living together Christianly" to them was the conviction and commitment which the founders in particular have on making a difference in the local neighborhood and surrounding community by means of witness and action. Mako and Ming first pointed to Christ's Great



Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 ("Then Jesus came to them and said... go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...") They also spoke of the responsibility believers have before God to help the needy as reflected in Matthew 25:40-45 ("The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me' and conversely, 'He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'"). Also related to the mission was a belief in the value of engaging in ministry on a small, neighborhood scale, quoting Zechariah 4:10 where God chastises his people saying, "Who dares despise the day of small things?"

For Mako and Ming N., one scripture was mentioned relating to life together, specifically Romans 12:18: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone". But from there Mako returned to the theme of mission, quoting John 1:14 in Eugene Peterson's paraphrase, *The Message*: "The Word became flesh...and moved into the neighborhood." This was put forth as a motivating example and metaphor of who they hope to be in their life and ministry on Nightingale Street.

Those of the Green House represent the other end of the spectrum, seeing their mission as being a more internal one, focusing on their life together and "living Christianly." Lon S., the founder, related, "There [are] lots of scripture passages [that motivate us]: Ephesians, Paul's epistles and the OT writings as well....[We saw] the collected view and design God had and how we're pretty

acculturated, independent people [in this culture], and so we kept feeling that the scripture was saying things that only made sense much more in a community of faith.” Lon particularly emphasized Matthew 16:28-20 where Jesus says “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” Lon described this as “the power of agreement” as Christians. He said, “Whatever we do together that is in agreement, or ‘amen’ together, apparently according to Jesus, we’re actually doing Kingdom work. We’re changing the Kingdom whatever we agree on, on earth...There is this mystical power that is associated with agreement. And so there are a lot of things that we could disagree on, because we’re very different, we’re very diverse socially and geographically and probably politically and all that kind of stuff. But I don’t think we run into a lot of disagreement in this community, because we aren’t on a “mission,” per se, other than trying to live our lives out authentically in the Christian faith.”

At the Hall Hotel, co-leader Cathi C. said she placed a plaque of 1 Corinthians 13, the famous “love chapter” in the kitchen for all of the residents to see by way of reminder of how they should live together. With the same goal, one Christmas her husband, Brian, consolidated all of the “one anothers,” passages in scripture which instruct believers in the ways they should properly treat one another (see Appendix D) and shared them in a Christmas letter to community members. Brian related that, “For me that was extremely powerful.”

Brian also cited the whole book of Ephesians, as well, as being a foundational guide in living out the practical unity of the Body of Christ. Other scriptures mentioned were Philippians 2:2 and the example of the humility of Christ in relating to people, and Acts chapter 2 (“They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers”) and Acts chapter 6 (the selection and commissioning of the first deacons) as examples to emulate in facing and working through conflict to find positive solutions.

### *Definitions of Community*

Next, interviewees were asked to define or explain their understanding of “community.” They were also asked to share examples from living in their context where they felt most like they were experiencing or had experienced a genuine or poignant sense of community.

There were only a few responses attempting to give a specific or concrete definition of community. The interviewer was frequently met with stretches of silence after asking this question. Interviewees confessed that they had a difficult time giving a precise definition, even those who were veterans or leaders. They all did, however, have a great deal to share about specific experiences which exemplified or embodied community for them.

Definitions that were offered not surprisingly included responses related to *shared lives*. Jessica from Green House said, “For me it’s supporting each other from day to day—and knowing that with struggles and all that you’re going

through, there are people who can talk about it, can share with you and you can pray for each other.” Mark from Mill Street House gave a concise response, saying “Community is nothing if not having a *permeable life*.” Lon of Green House similarly described community as “Living [a] kind of unvarnished Christian life lived out with God together.” Brother B. of the Community of Jesus gave a more functional definition when he related, “It’s when I’m not thinking of myself. When I’m able to be concerned about other people, not worrying about being tired or having so many things to do or whatever it happens to be. When I’m enough in Christ that I’m not worried about myself, then community is a blessing.”

Ming from the Nightingale Community said, “[When I think of community] I think shared life and shared mission. But maybe in a more *daily way* than people think in most churches.” Reemphasizing their strong mission mindset of the community Mako added, “I think the shared life flows more out of the shared mission. To me there’s a hierarchy of how I think about those things – the mission. And that helps us really make decisions about how much of a shared life ought we to have, or is it helpful to have.” He went on to say that “I think our full healing and full sanctification take place in the context of mission. It’s my way of interpreting the gospel. Everything Jesus did was for the sake of training us for mission, so if we don’t actually make choices in line with that, then we’re being selfish somehow.” Echoing Bonhoeffer’s thoughts in his book, *Life Together*, Mako emphasized that in reality, every Christian is in community simply by virtue

of being in the Body of Christ and/or being part of any larger community that they live or work in. "The key is what we do with it."

Carolyn B., who was raised in an employee community village, defined community as "Having similar needs, similar values, common interests, relationships, and caring friendships. These characteristics were fostered by the families of those who were considered the "bosses" of the company. From the plant superintendent and the plant engineer, to the men who unloaded the coal cars—all were neighbors and friends."

*Common worship* was also an expressed aspect of community, especially for those in more liturgical communities. In speaking of her experiences in a Taizé community and in various monastic retreats Martha G. said that the things that contribute most to the sense of community for her are first common worship and weekly Eucharist. Secondly, the discipline of daily prayer and study. She said that these may be done together while at separate locations, but ideally together in a common area. She pointed out that the *Book of Common Prayer* is organized in a Benedictine way and takes one through all of the daily offices. As a priest she also has the two books of the *Daily Office*, which she says are good for study individually and corporately. "Nothing can compare with knowing that believers all around the world are studying and praying in the same way you are daily," she explained.

Jin Min L. of the Hall Hotel said she had spent some time personally reflecting on the question. She described community in one way as "the coming to the table with pieces of yourself that you usually hide from others." She also

described what she called the substantive nature of community in terms of “the commitment of the parties to one another, but also to higher principles of what should this life be about, and what is purposeful and meaningful when it comes to *how* we live....If we’re simply committed to one another—because we’re sinful and broken—there are times when we just don’t want to be around each other [and] we could easily say it’s not worth it. But because there’s that vertical commitment [to God] as well as the horizontal commitment [to one another] I think that’s where community happens. That’s the container. Those are the sinews – the gluten that holds everything together.”

Finally, Brian related thoughts from a book he recently read: “One guy I was reading recently spoke of ‘sacred friendships’ – and how in that there’s a lot that God does in those kind of ordinary table conversations, or bumping into each other during the course of the day that He moves and kind of inhabits. I think there’s a lot of that in this house, versus a lot of other situations where you have to have a small group meeting now or you have to meet with someone mentoring you now...These [moments of ‘community’] happen very much in the flow.”

In regard to examples or poignant experiences of community shared by interviewees, those who lived in more liturgical communities tended to share experiences within liturgical contexts. Sister G. of the Community of Jesus spoke of her experience when the whole community processes into the church for special times of worship. “When we process at a service—that really gets you if the whole community is there. We wear robes, you see, for the chants office, and also Sundays and Lent. So yes, that does give us a feeling of community.

But because I'm at the front, at different times I turn around to watch the community coming in and that really gets me. And that we're all bowed together. Or we're going up to Communion, and it's wonderful. We're all in this together. We're all going the same direction, then that clicks."

Martin S., an Episcopal clergyman and also a member of the Community of Jesus related, "For me, is when we're in there celebrating Eucharist. Not all the time. But there are moments when we're all gathered there in that church, when maybe I'm incensing the people – that was the last time it happened I remember – I remember walking down the aisle incensing the people for part of the service and I could hardly contain myself. Inside I thought, 'This is amazing! Look at these people! They love me. I love them. I don't care what happened yesterday or what's going to happen tomorrow. At this moment right now we are so bound together that I can taste it.'"

Among those in more liturgical communities responses were not limited to these liturgically-connected experiences, however. Along with others from non-liturgical communities, rich stories and experiences were shared from their lives together. These stories came from both positive experiences as well as from what might be considered negative experiences.

Some examples of positive experiences:

Erik H.<sup>21</sup> from the Hall Hotel graduated from college the previous year and moved from Chicago to work in Boston. His parents only knew one person in Boston, Ralph, to whom they referred him. Through Ralph (who worked with the adjacent and affiliated Emmanuel Gospel Center) Eric learned about and joined

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<sup>21</sup> Erik H., interviewed by author, Boston, MA , March 3, 2011.

the Hall Hotel community. Eric remarked that unlike his college friends who moved into unfamiliar places and struggled for 6 months or more to feel at home, his experience stood out in that he says he never felt lonely or isolated. Eric saw this as a metaphor, saying "...that's kind of a way of thinking about community."

Jenn. J. of the Mill Street House also shared a sense of safety and security which motivated her and her husband to join the community. "we just moved in here in July. My husband graduated from the seminary and got a job and so had been in academia and we were looking for housing – and the price was right... [laughs] But things equal to and even more was that we would be living close to lots of people you don't know and you don't know the situation, and was a little scary venturing off campus, and so we were really excited when we found out about this... because we wanted to have a community of people...and support and on top of that coming from a place where we were taking classes about Christianity and were living that. And it seemed like a good transition from being on seminary campus to this and then finally move on to wherever."

Catherine H., an inquirer with the community of Aiden and Hilda on Lindesfarne Island in England related an almost instantaneous feeling of community upon meeting the first person from Aiden & Hilda, continuing through her time there at the guesthouse. "I was on my own and looking for the community and I found a woman at a corner and it turned out to be the mistress of the guesthouse. As strangers we sat down and shared our lives with each other. We cried, shared, laughed. It was of God. She'd been a part of the community for a number of years and had shared with me the wonderful stories



of people who have showed up and who had been saved sovereignly ...There was peacefulness in the House. Their outreach was so healthy.... I certainly did sense the Lord's presence in a vivid way when I was there."

Ming N. from the Nightingale Community shared, "This one's related to the mission. I remember one time sitting out in the back yard and there was a group of kids playing with a basketball and hoop, and another set of younger kids in the sandbox, and another set of kids doing something else – drawing with sidewalk chalk or something like that. And there were a few different adults [from the community] engaging with the different groups and [it came with] the sense of being able to engage with various groups and different ones of us being involved. And a lot of times when I feel like people are using their gifts and you watch people using their gifts, that's fun and I feel like I'm in 'the zone.'" In regard to experiences within the community, "Recently, one way I've seen that happening is actually with Lisa's husband, Dan, who's really been growing in prayer, sense of the Holy Spirit and intimacy with God and then also, gifts of intercession. I think that he's been extending and offering leadership in those areas in a genuine, vulnerable way – a way that I've really appreciated."

Some of the most moving experiences and examples shared were those that came out of potentially negative circumstances. Brother D. of the Society of St. John the Evangelist shared that he experienced his deepest sense of community at those times when he had been at his lowest points and had "blown it." At his worst and weakest. For example, he shared that he had just decided not to take his final vows. There was great sorrow expressed in regard to that on

the part of the other brothers, and Brother D. said that through that he learned just how deep the bonds run. He said, "The times I experienced the most genuine sense of community was in the midst of personal fragility and vulnerability."

Both Brother B. and Martin S. of the Community of Jesus related similar experiences. Martin said, "I think I experience community most when I'm at my weakest. And I say that because I avoid that as much as possible! I'm not dissimilar to other people I'm sure, but in the times of my greatest need I've experienced this community in ways I wouldn't have gone looking for necessarily. Or sometimes it's just little, practical things where I've had to say to someone, "Will you help me?" And it is a very difficult thing to do. I'm getting no better at it than twenty years ago, but by virtue of living here it's a known quantity, we're all familiar with that. Every single one of us. Now some of those needs have been very dramatic and others less so, but...the common thread is that those are times when the community is tangible and so real."

Sister G. of the Community of Jesus shared a snapshot. She related with a chuckle, "When you're going into the refectory and there are sixty other people bashing into each other. You get in the food line for dinner and you [roll your eyes and] say, '*This is the common life!*'"

Beth of the Mill Street Community related a story: "There was a couple that used to live here that had a dog that they really loved. And we actually had a no-pets rule. But we felt they were really called to come, so we sort of waived the no-pets rule for them. And one of them was out one night walking the dog over

by Stop & Shop and the dog got away from her and was run over. And the entire house just went into action. There were a number of things that happened: the dog had to be taken somewhere because it was still alive at that point; the kids had to be cared for; then the woman had been bit as the dog was panicking—she had a very bad bite and had to go to the hospital—so there was that. Everybody just kind of kicked into gear—the whole house was ministering one way or another to the situation. I remember Mark [Beth's husband] saying something like, "This is *it*." Mark interjected and said, "It felt *absolutely* natural. There was nothing contrived or panicky about it. Concerned, yes. Action, yes. But it was like everybody knew what to do because we'd been breathing the same air for a few months." Beth concluded: If you were in a triple-decker with people you got along with or said hi over the mailbox or whatever, and that happened, there would be the need to call [to let others know or ask for help.]. But here everybody knew to step up to the plate. This family had been hurt and that was correct, I thought."

Brian and Cathi of the Hall Hotel had many experiences in their 27 years of living in intentional community. They spoke of a couple of situations where children of community members were in trouble and how it revealed to them the depth of their unity and commitment they had to one another. Brian said, "I think of one family we were living with years ago. We were out hiking all together – our kids were with us and one of their kids got lost in the woods. I remember feeling 'this is my kid,' almost. I realized how strong of a connection I had with this family and with their children when we thought that one of the daughters was lost. And

we found her after a while – but that surprised me how God had really knit our hearts together and I realized in that moment how really connected we were.”

Cathi related another instance. “I remember [feeling the same] wondering where [this family's] son Matthew, was...” Brian remembered the incident: “We were in Dorchester and the kid had night terrors and ran out of the house in the middle of the night.” “They couldn’t find him in the house or on the property,” said Cathi. “They knew he had run. He was thirteen. And he was only wearing his underwear. And a couple of prostitutes had found him several blocks away, down Washington Street, and gave him a ride home. [They found him] gasping on the doorstep of the church. And they said ‘Son, you’d better get in the car.’ And he’s like [makes grimace]...” “They’re prostitutes!” [But] it was okay – they realized he was not in his right mind. They knew they needed to help him so they got him to get into the car and he directed them to this house.”

Brian added, “I think of another time years ago that was kind of funny. Out in Idaho, where 2 families were running these 4 houses with 35+ people. And me and Benji were sitting there and we had no money, and we didn’t pay ourselves for six months. And our pay wasn’t that much. And some money had come in and I remember sitting there with him in this room and we were praying and talking and this check had come in. And I can’t remember if it was he or I, but one of us pushed the check to the other person’s side of the table. And it sat there for a few seconds. And the other person pushed it back across the table—and it went back and forth and back and forth—and I can’t even remember where it landed to tell you the truth. But that’s how we felt about each other. That’s how we felt about

our families. And there was absolutely no weirdness it in *at all* –to feel like I'm doing the martyr thing. Just all that stuff was gone. We just started laughing after a while. So you just realize how connected your families had become and how your relationships were. It surprises you.”

### *Challenges*

As expected and yet as surprising as poignant subjective moments or experiences of “community” may be, so are the challenges faced when attempting to live in such a way. Interviewees were asked what they would say in their experience most threatens or detracts from their experience of genuine community. Answers fell generally into three categories: First, a lack of commitment to the community—its purpose and relationships; second, negative attitudes which contribute to a greater potential for conflict or ineffective handling of conflict; and third, idealism, a double-edged sword which provides motivation and yet greater potential for disillusionment in the experience of community.

#### **Lack of commitment; loss of intentionality**

When members of the community do not carry out the commitment they made to the community in regard to their relationships and/or the mission, it affects everyone in a negative way. Beth of the Mill Street House said, “The toughest thing for us is when people absent themselves or kind of emotionally withdraw from one of the main activities. Morning Prayer, house meal (for example, someone always ‘has to leave a little early’) because our mandatory

practices are pretty low-key and if someone starts to kind of check out of them there isn't much of a safety net below that. We've never had anyone flat-out say 'I'm not coming anymore,' it's just these sort of lame excuses time after time, and addressing that passive/aggressive resistance can be tough."

Brian, of the Hall Hotel said, "*When people choose to isolate*. When they come into the house—they say yes—and then they go into their room and close the door and hide out. They cloister themselves within the house. That's very painful to watch. We realize they're struggling with something or whatever, but it hurts everyone in the house. It makes everyone feel awkward." His wife, Cathi, added, "There has to be time made on a regular basis to really be able [to] sink in together—to take some time. [There needs to be] intentionality. Where there is time spent together where there is no other agenda in the back of your head, and where you can just be by yourselves as a group that lives in the house."

At the Green House, Marcos E.<sup>22</sup> said, "Busyness [is a threat]. Not being here. There's actually a woman who lives in our community who is so busy that we don't see her. I feel bad because I'm missing out on knowing her. She's really missing out on a lot, too because she's so busy."

Related to the problem of withdrawal, Beth identified the existence of pre-existing social commitments on the part of someone joining the community as a potential problem. "It's been a bit challenging incorporating people who come in and already have very strong local social networks. A lot of our residents are somewhat transient—students, etcetera, and very open to new friendships. So if

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<sup>22</sup> Marcos E., interviewed by author, Jamaica Plain, MA, October 25, 2010.

somebody moves into our group of 6-8 people who isn't actually looking to socialize with those people that can be hard."

#### Negative attitudes about conflict or resulting in conflict

While some individuals interviewed (Brother D., Catherine H.) named conflict or unresolved conflict directly as threats to community, others from the group interviews highlighted attitudes which they found led to conflict or hindered effective resolution of conflict.

Shima B.<sup>23</sup> of the Green House said, "Being arrogant, in whatever form that comes in [is a threat]. Thinking you have the answer and the other person doesn't, or just not being tender enough to somebody else's 'stuff.' [This can result in real or] perceived conflict."

Reflecting on reasons why they once needed to ask an individual to leave the community, Mako of the Nightingale Community said, "Un-reconciliation is probably the biggest one....There were things we should have caught when our [acceptance] process was not as thoughtful as it could have been. And [the expulsion] was the result of having a person be narcissistic. Because it takes a fair amount of maturity to live this way." Lisa,<sup>24</sup> from the same community added, "Yes, I think along those lines, [if a person has] hardship with being authentic and vulnerable, but without grandiosity; I think it goes along with the narcissistic aspect. When you're kind of projecting a certain self that's not the real self." Related to this, Brother D. stated, "On an existential level [there's the] fear and

<sup>23</sup> Shima B., interviewed by author, Jamaica Plain, MA, October 25, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Lisa, interviewed by author, Dorchester, MA, March 21, 2011.

avoidance of conflict. A resistance to vulnerability and a rejection of the idea of vulnerability and frailty.”

“Materialism and individualism are deep, core, root issues in there and they come out different ways,” said Brian C. of the Hall Hotel. He believes that root causes of much of the negative attitudes and conflicts which arise in community are the results of these strong, North American societal traits.

Of all the individuals and groups interviewed the interviewees from Community of Jesus spent the greatest amount of time discussing the issue of negative attitudes and interpersonal conflict and to the greatest depth. This is likely influenced by the fact that of all the communities interviewed they had been in existence the longest—over 50 years. In addition, each interviewee was a longtime member of the community for at least a decade or two or more.

When Community of Jesus members were asked what threatens or detracts from the sense or experience of community Sister G. said, “Conflict and gossiping tears away at the fabric of community. You can’t have community if people are angry at each other, or jealous. Or have guerilla warfare... [I think that] the biggest hindrance is speaking about another person rather than to their face.” Martin S. said, “Holding grudges. Thinking ill and not dealing with that. And that is destructive.” Barbara M. continued, “Because we have agreed to be honest with each other. If I have a major gripe against somebody or other and I just harbor it in my heart, refusing to talk with anybody about it, just going totally submerged, I think that is one of the great dangers. Because it not only destroys my relationship with the other person, but it has an effect in the community. You



can tell, all of us can tell, when something like that has happened. So it's very, very important to have out with it in the appropriate place, and get the help to restore my own self, and if necessary mend somebody else. I think something that's harbored inside and not brought forth is a real detriment." Martin continued, "I think *pride* is one of the things that destroys relationships very quickly. I would translate part of that being my unwillingness to be wrong, or more wrong than the person next to me. Or my unwillingness to serve. For me it comes back to being wrong. But once you do that you say, 'I'm not willing to come to Barbara and say "I'm sorry; I wronged you here."' [They're] withholding love in doing that. And so it's not just that it breaks something, *it doesn't help to create something*. Coming to somebody and saying, 'I'm sorry; I wronged you' becomes an opportunity for an expression of love, which then builds community. *Not* doing it, then eventually relationships begin to decay." In regard to pride, he added, "It may take just as much humility to say 'I'm wrong' as it is to say 'you hurt my feelings.'"

Sister G. shared a recent story. "I heard recently of one of the small children, two or three years old, and it was obvious he was angry. And so he was asked if he was angry. 'Yes, I am angry at Grandpa because he didn't do [something] for me.' So the person, whoever it was, I think his mother, took him to the grandfather who also lives in the Community and he got straight with his grandfather. And he's two years old! And he knew right away. He's been born here and he's lived in that atmosphere with his parents and grandparents. It's interesting how it gets inside, even with our human nature."

It should be noted that although this research was not intended to focus on the issue of conflict in community, it became clear that conflict was a central concern for every community. In fact, the one issue that stood out the most as characterizing the communities was a sense of commitment and intentionality in regard to facing and resolving conflict.

### Idealism

A final, somewhat surprising threat to community identified by people from three of the five community groups and one of the individuals interviewed, had to do with problems that arise when individuals' expectations become too unrealistic or demanding. These have to do with expectations people may have of other individuals or the community in general, in regard to areas of focus on the Intentionality Scale.

On the Internally-focused end of the spectrum, individuals may expect or demand that either interpersonal relationships or individual spiritual growth develop more quickly than they actually do. On the Externally-focused end of the spectrum, disillusionment and discontent can spring up in regard to the manner or speed of pursuing or realizing the missional goals.

In regard to idealism, Brian C. of the Hall Hotel said, "There are no shortcuts to spiritual growth. [People think] 'I want your bullet-point solution.' They expect people to do that and real life doesn't work that way." Jessica K. of the Green house admitted her occasional disillusionment, "I tend to be idealistic. I have visions of how I would like community to be....One of the hardest things for

me to learn is how to flow with other people's styles of conflict resolution; because not everyone works through things by working through them together. So sometimes I've had to learn to give people space and that, you know, we never do end up talking through the issues."

Brother D. explained the idealism hindrance as "...Actually *aiming* for purest community. Like Bonhoeffer warns about in his book, *Life Together*. A drive for perfection which puts pressure on everyone and worships one's own creation rather than the Creator. We are [intended] to be both dependent and independent, but maturity brings us to a healthy balance of interdependence with one another."

Lisa of the Nightingale Community related her and her husband's struggles with idealism in regard to the mission of the community to the neighborhood and surrounding community. "Everyone has a picture of what they're looking for when they come here and how close or how far away that is. How you handle that [ideal] is going to make a huge difference in whether you end up thriving in the time you are here or whether you even end up staying... That's something I think of a lot with my husband. I feel like the Lord has really given him a great picture for asking for more, wanting to see more fruit, more transformation....more life in our neighborhood. And how he handles the tension between the ideal of what he feels like God is pushing for and where we are makes a huge difference for him, whether we can stick it out. And also whether everybody is coming along with us, you know what I mean? Or he's like, 'This is how I feel and maybe see these things, and everybody else is on another

wavelength.' I can think of folks who came here in the past with a lot of passion, but things weren't happening ...the way they wanted. And that was really tough. And I wondered myself, if that was what led down this road of spending less and less time at the house, even though they were living here." Asked if what they felt might have been disillusionment, she replied, "Exactly, and so they were spending their time elsewhere, which was multiplying the difficulty of connecting here. [So] things like that – how we deal with our ideals. We're all on some level kind of idealistic when we come here."

### *Conflict*

Interviewees were next asked how they deal or have dealt with conflict in their intentional communities. Not surprisingly, all communities and individuals acknowledged the presence and challenge of conflict, but specific, articulated guidelines or instructions for dealing with conflict were present in only three of the five communities (Nightingale, Mill Street and the Community of Jesus). One community did not have written guidelines but said that they would likely have them if the group were larger (Hall Hotel). The fifth community acknowledged no written guidelines but expressed an interest in developing one (Green House).

The absence of written guidelines, however, did not mean that there was no commitment to or process for addressing conflict in these two communities. The leaders of both (Lon S. and Brian and Cathi C.) spoke of the need to have "personal conversations" with members in conflict. Interviewees from all communities mentioned the importance of speaking personally and privately with

those with whom they had conflict—according to Matthew 18—and although not a comfortable thing, it was a normal part of their community life. In addition, every community interviewed had a regular, built-in opportunity for members to address issues together by means of attending a “required”<sup>25</sup> weekly meal and meeting.

The community which had the greatest and most detailed reflection and response to this question was the Community of Jesus. In what was normally between a 1.5 and 2 hour interview, the group easily spent 45 minutes of that time talking about the issue of dealing with conflict. Guiding principles for dealing with conflict within the Community of Jesus are contained in *The Rule of Life of the Community of Jesus: Principles and Procedures*, adopted by Chapter, March 2003. Five vocational principles are articulated therein, the fifth of which is “The Call to Reconciliation and Unity.” The paragraph on Reconciliation reads as follows:

The reconciliation we enjoy with God is embodied in our relationships with one another. The living Body of Christ on earth now moves in the shape of the church, and nothing makes for more effective action than the complete unity of the Body’s members. The influence of God’s love at work in the world is diluted by the divisions and strife that afflict the people of God. Therefore, it is in the affairs of everyday life that we seek a depth of reconciliation with each other that will reflect more clearly the gift of God’s peace to us all. Such reconciliation requires generosity of love for others, repentance for sin, and the pursuit of forgiveness and understanding. We must never let our efforts for reconciliation deteriorate, nor settle for external appearances of agreement, for we know that the integrity of our prayer for church unity is dependent upon our commitment to the members of the church in this place. [cf. John 17:20-21; Matt 5:24; Eph 2:14]<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Weekly meetings were listed or cited as requirements for all the communities, but there was always some flexibility based on personal circumstances.

<sup>26</sup> *The Rule of Life of the Community of Jesus: Principles and Procedures* (2003), 11.

Martin S. explained, "This [conflict resolution] was a central teaching when the community began. The founders saw our commitment to Christ inherently related to the way we live with one another. To say we love God and not love our neighbor ... they took that quite literally. This is where it shows up. My conflict with God shows up in my conflict with my brothers and sisters... They were willing to talk about fights in the home and conflicts with children. Fights between husband and wife."

Sister G. added, "The only rule in this community [was] that you do not speak about another person behind their back. You must go, take a friend if you want, and air your grievances with the person that you're upset or angry with. You never speak behind one another's back.... It involves a cost; it's a suffering sometimes. Sometimes it's very difficult to say something in truth to someone else. You try and do it with Christ's love and charity as much as possible—though sometimes [laughing] you don't!... The tool for community 'working' is right in the scriptures. Living in the light, living in the truth with each other. Otherwise, if Jesus isn't there we can't do this; we can't live this close, we can't live that close in our church. And so this is one of the founding charisms of this community is how to live in the light together. How to live honestly with each other and in love. How to speak the truth to each other."

Martin continued, "What that does is when we have to work together or interact together in some way where the conflicts might come, we know that the common life we share will supersede or carry us through the division that we might experience along the way. So I would say that the blood—the family

blood—which flows through our veins, the spiritual blood – is stronger than anything else. It will, if we keep working at it, carry us through what we overcome.”

Inherent to membership in this community, then, is the expectation that members will be committed to taking the initiative to address personal conflict whenever they become aware of it. Virtually from the very beginning this was a hallmark of the community—although interviewees related that it became more defined, refined and codified as the years went on.

Brother B. confirmed the approach within the monastery at the Community of Jesus: “Fundamentally, within the brotherhood for example, we’re committed to each other to the extent that we’re not going to let something go unresolved. There’s no way that we can force a person to resolve something—we can’t. But we’re all committed to work together in community and to do this through the Holy Spirit together. And we have all of these sorts of mechanisms built in through experience. We have it through our vows, which give us the impetus and the structure to work out these conflicts. I had an argument with one of the brothers last night. We got mad at each other. However, ticking in the back of my mind was [sarcastically] ‘Big deal!’ [Because] it really wasn’t such a big deal—since I knew that before the evening was through we were going to be resolved, we were going to be friends again, and we’ll be closer because of it. So we got a couple of other brothers together and sat down and worked it out, and that’s what happened.”

Finally, when conflicts get too difficult to handle, members take a next step. “You work it out with the people you live with and at home,” Martin S. said, “And sometimes there are conflicts there which need a third party so to speak, somebody outside the immediate relationship.” Since the community is so large, Barbara M. added, “Clergy are always [also] available [for mediation and assistance].”

In the other end of the spectrum in regard to explicit guidelines and procedures, lay the Green House and Hall Hotel communities: They both said they had nothing currently in writing in regard to dealing with conflict, although it should be noted that Cathi and Brian C. of the Hall Hotel had lived in communities previously where there were written guidelines. Nevertheless, interviewees from both communities had plenty to share by way of experience and insight in trying to deal effectively with conflict.

Lon S. of the Green House said, “Related to conflict, it’s like in a family. Because what with the space, that means that when you do have issues with one another you have to work it out, because you’re going to be seeing that person whether you want to avoid them or not. If you have a problem with your brother and sister or wife and husband—it’s a much bigger issue if you say you’re not going to interact with that person. So there’s a certain kind of *implied structural commitment* living in a situation like this.” Indeed, intentional Christian communities at the very least carry an “implied structural commitment” of some kind in regard to relationships within the community.



Brian and Cathi C. of the Hall Hotel spoke of the issue of degree of actual community structure in regard to behavior and relational expectations which can lead to conflict. They shared of times when people have actually been asked to leave previous communities of which they had been a part because of individuals' problematic behavior. "[There were some] who we didn't have enough structure for because they were dealing with life-controlling issues like drugs," said Brian. "We said, 'We can only help you so much. This is as far as we can go. You need something that is high-structure; we're medium structure.' This house now [Hall Hotel] is low-structure, but in that situation we were medium structure. 'Sorry, my friend, we've been going through this for months, even years....' So you have to balance out their individual concerns with the overall community temperature and what's going on there. Sometimes problems surrounded money or finances. Sometimes people just have no money. Maybe they had a job and lost it, or they've been drinking their paycheck. There are times where it wasn't just about the money. 'You don't want to work.' All kinds of root issues—you have to peel back and try to get down to what's under the surface, what's really core. It may not be appropriate for the house. And those [situations] are really awkward but you just have to go through it." For them addressing conflict involved having these kinds of private personal conversations with individuals.

In reflecting on conflict in general, Shima B. of the Green House spoke of personal benefits even in the midst of the difficulty of dealing with conflict. "I've been forced to pray a lot more. Because choosing to—the big word is choice—

choosing to be in community, you have to deal with these things. The choice is, 'Well, what am I going to do? Do I pack my bags and leave? I can't do that; I've got three kids—and lots of stuff!' And the 'agreement' that Lon was talking about – the commitment to living out our walk, trying to be Christlike. For me to have a conflict and just go off – to get myself and go – to shut somebody out – it's not Christlike at all. And so you're faced with that; you're really faced with choice. Before, you could shove stuff like that in a corner. It's easier for you to say 'I'm just going to ignore them' but when you're in a community like this, when you've made the choice to be in a space like this with other people then you just keep having choices and you need to give it some kind of thought. And so for me that's been it. Just praying a lot more: 'Lord, I don't want this conflict in my heart...' I need to work it out with this person. My biggest prayer is 'God, I need to see them the way you see them.' And so that's it for me—just praying a whole lot, and just making the choice over and over to be more Christlike and to have a better attitude."

Lon reflected on the constructiveness of conflict as well. "This is one other axiom that I have. After about three or four years, I really saw the same pattern over and over again. And I think it's a key dynamic that to me is one of the most ironic or most unanticipated outcomes that still continues to this day to be a consistent dynamic in the community. What I have seen over and over again is that the 'butting heads' kind of conflict between two members of the community tends to be a remarkable catalyst for change in one of those members. What I mean by that is positive change, in the sense that that person is forced against

their will to become more Christlike. And kind of the hard edges get smoothed and rounded and matured because of the conflict. Most of the time the other person has very little change. Usually the situation is that somebody gets really exasperated with someone and the person never changes their behavior, and they might be the offending person, and they might continue to be the offending person, but what happens is...it's like the baggage that we bring with us [actually] ends up being a catalyst for positive change."

While members of the two above communities—with their lack of explicit guidelines in regard to conflict—nevertheless often had positive outcomes, the Nightingale Community and the Mill Street House did have explicit guidelines and some equally positive outcomes. In the Seven Core Values of the Nightingale Community, the fifth Core Value is *Reconciliation for the sake of Witness*, based on John 13:35. It reads as follows:

Jesus said that the world will know his reality by our unity. Given the cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity in the household, we are aware of the interest the neighborhood will take in us as well as the potential for conflict between us. Thus, we actively try to understand each other better and seek to resolve conflict according to biblical teaching. We do not shy away from healthy discussions.<sup>27</sup>

Ming N. elaborated, "And so there is an expectation [here] that there would be reconciliation—that you can't let conflict fester. And within that there is a spectrum of ways to try to work that out. There are some kinds of conflicts where you're going to work that out within yourself and then you're going to be 'Okay, I worked that out in myself and I'm okay with in—I'm going to let it be or let it go.'

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<sup>27</sup> Mako Nagasawa, "Uncovering Hidden Treasure," [http://nagasawafamily.org/urban\\_values.htm](http://nagasawafamily.org/urban_values.htm) (accessed April 2, 2012).

And there's other times where that's clearly not working for you; you've got to go to the person. So we would say there is a spectrum of ways to work it out, but the end goal has to be reconciliation. When asked what would be possible grounds for asking a person to leave the Nightingale community, Mako responded, "Refusal to reconcile." He related that the process for every new person to consider living with them, or for them to consider the person as being a good fit to live with them, is that, "I review those seven values with them and tell stories about why these have been important to us. And then ask them, 'How have you lived out this value—or what would you do in this situation?' And that's where we get a really good sense for how mature this person is, and if this is the first time encountering these values."

At the Mill Street House, Mark and Beth implement a modified version of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's Community Life Statement, designed to outline behavior expected within the Christian community. General relational principles in the Mill Street House statement include: "We will seek to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace, and in gentleness, patience and humility, accept one another in love." Secondly, "We will seek to encourage one another to mature in Christ-likeness through attempting to speak the truth in love." Dealing with conflict specifically is addressed in the following statement: "We believe where conflict or sin occurs in our community, a biblical process such as stated in Matthew 18:15-20 should be followed to seek correction, forgiveness, restitution and reconciliation." The whole Community Life Statement, along with tenant information and explanation of the liturgical commitment

schedule (see Appendix F) is given to all prospective members of the community so all can know in advance what is expected of them in relation to community life and relationships.

In reflecting on conflict within the Mill Street House community over the years, Beth M. related, "Most of our conflicts have been with roommates in units, and they have typically negotiated those themselves, although occasionally help from Mark and me has been needed. So people come to us and ask. But we also have a time at our weekly house meal called House Business. This slot comes up every week, so everyone knows they will have that weekly chance to say anything that's on their mind and everyone expects that they may need to listen to some issue. This takes a little pressure off people to have to find a way to bring something up. I think also because we basically have people here for 1-3 years, there is a kind of automatic feeling of 'Hey, it's not forever' that makes dealing with annoyances etcetera, easier than if you were going to be living with somebody for the next decade."

It is clear that an expectation of facing and dealing with conflict is an integral part of life in all the intentional communities interviewed, whether or not guidelines for dealing with such were specifically articulated. In the preceding question, the naming of specific threats to the realization of community also included many references to unresolved or poorly resolved conflicts. Therefore, effective and intentional conflict management and resolution can be seen as core functions—and even pathways—to the apprehension of a sense of authentic community in these contexts.

### *Lessons Learned*

Interviewees were next asked to reflect on their overall experience in intentional Christian community, and to relate what they believed to be the greatest personal lessons that they have learned thus far. Responses ranged from philosophical / theological (“God designed for us to be in community”) to practical categories (“Keep out of each other’s hair”). Most common responses were divided into four categories: Humility, Conviction of Design, Realism, and Spiritual and Personal Growth.

#### Humility

The most common response, and the one which persons from four of the five either mentioned specifically or alluded to (as well as two individual interviewees) was how they had learned humility in relation to others.

Ming from the Nightingale Community said “I think for me, it’s been a lot of things, but I guess [a major lesson is] *the ability to be led by other people*. For example, right now, I am being blessed by Dan’s leadership in prayer and loving God and experiencing more from God in that way. At other times it’s being led by Leslie’s generosity and risk-taking...So I think it’s just being blessed by other people gifts. I feel like left to my own devices I would be way more stagnant in my own faith life.”

Lisa of the same community added, “To know what it means to compromise. *And to submit to other people*. When to overlook an offense and what does it mean to love.”

Brian from the Hall Hotel related, “When you live with people that have such a different starting place as far as [their approach and assumptions in relation to] community goes – it makes you extremely aware of just how individualistic you are. So it’s very challenging.” His wife, Cathi, added, “Others bring out the best in us as well as what we’d really like to see changed about ourselves—the hard things about ourselves.” Brian continued, “It’s leading with a reconciling edge in all that you do; being open and gracious; giving each other a lot of grace.”

In relation to how he conducts himself with other people, Mark D. from The Mill Street House related that through the experience of community, “I’ve learned to tone myself down—at least somewhat. In letting other people have more air time. Giving other people space and time.”

Finally, one of the individuals interviewed, Brother D. from the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, reflected insightfully, “What has changed me has not been the brothers I liked, but the ones I didn’t...”

### Conviction of design

Another quite common theme in people’s responses—and which was mentioned by individuals in three of the five community groupings—was a new or renewed sense of conviction that living in committed community with other believers was a gift, and even expectation of God.

Lon S. of the Green House, said, “I will just say that I think for me I have this conviction that *we’re supposed to do community*. We can’t avoid it any

longer, so we're just going to do it.<sup>28</sup> But having lived in community now for a number of years what it has shown me clearly is that *we're really designed to live in community*. Especially in western culture, in our atomized way of living, the pace and busyness in my life is *increased* in community, not lessened. Still it's so clear to me from living here that this is much more how God intended for us to live than the atomized way that most people in the US and western culture live – and me being a product of that culture. So it's developed within me the conviction that this is much healthier.”

Shima from the same community added, “It’s a *good* thing to be in community. And it is God’s design –for us to be together, to share and to love one another.”

Mark of Mill Street, after sharing a similar conviction said, “I can’t imagine living any other way. How lucky we are to be able to live this way!”

Brian C. of the Hall Hotel—and who along with his wife, Cathi, have lived in intentional community the longest (27 years) summarized this lesson by saying, “God is the one who invented community, the one who *is* and really *makes* community happen.” Cathi related, “That’s’ his intention that we not be individual and are more complete when we are with others. First with himself, and then also with others.”

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<sup>28</sup> This is in relation to the clear call from God that Lon believed he received for starting the Green House community.



## Realism

Another frequent response in three of the five communities had to do with how people deal with idealism and acceptance of reality. Part of this reality has to do with the challenges and costs of living in such close community.

Catherine of the Society of Aiden & Hilda said, “There can be a dynamic in community in terms of the ministry that can be so powerful in terms of working together and ministering together. But there is a huge cost to it. And I think the cost really has to be to a great extent to giving up a great deal of individuality.”

Jenn. J.<sup>29</sup> from the Mill Street House compared the liturgical formation aspect of their purpose with the building of community aspect. “The regularity of the liturgical part [of our community life] has been really good and really fun, but I think the regularity of the communal part is harder.”

Reflecting on the challenges of living so closely with others for years, Lisa of the Nightingale Community said that a lesson for her was that “God doesn’t force one’s hand, but that he also doesn’t guarantee that you won’t have to stretch.” Ming of the same community related that a similar lesson for her was “Learning to hang with God through the hard things.”

Cathi of the Hall Hotel related, “I think our idea of what community looked like when we started was not how it really ended up. And yet a lot of community happened... Especially people who were of different cultures than us. [For example] our Ethiopian friends when they came –they were very warm and welcoming and expected us to really overlap with them food-wise and in their

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<sup>29</sup> Jenn J., interviewed by author, Beverly, MA, February 2, 2011.

room. They lived in one room—the whole family with their little guy—and really wanted to be with us all of the time—Levi and me especially. The women and the children overlapped a *lot* and that was their expectation. And it was a challenge for me to do that.”

Her husband, Brian, also reflected on dealing with expectations in regard to the development of relationships within the community. He said he learned about “going at the speed of relationship.” He said, “The more different you are from one another, the more challenging it is. But also there is definitely a long-term benefit to it in terms of personal transformation and so much more. So we need each other! We are interdependent ... upon one another in order to grow into the fullness of what God intends us to be. Maybe get nudged a little closer to His perspective on things.”

Jessica K. of the Green House’s lesson offered a good summation. “What has stuck with me what Bonhoeffer talks about is that *Christian community is what you have*—it is not the ideal you are striving for. Instead, whatever mess you’re in with other people, *this* is Christian community and *these* are the people. It’s not like ‘Oh, it would work better with other people who are more like me...’”

### Spiritual and personal growth

In every community individuals shared how living in community was helpful to them spiritually and personally. Of note were the in-depth responses given by those who had been in community the longest, Brian and Cathi, as well as members of the community that had been in existence the longest, the

Community of Jesus. Both had the time as individuals and as a group to learn from and reflect on lessons accumulated over the years by themselves and others.

Responses from members of the Community of Jesus centered on God and their relationships with one another. Brother B. said simply that what he has learned is that, "God loves me." Martin S. echoed the same sentiment. Brother B. went on to connect God's love with relationships. "We are able to love each other in Christ and experience the love of God."

Barbara M. commented, "I [have learned that I] don't have to be upset about anything or disturbed or angry or whatever any longer than it takes for me to find somebody to talk to and express it. And see what's behind it and whatever. So the fact that there's help always available that to me is one of the things that is a huge blessing of community."

Martin S. said, "[I've learned that] being with other people, there's this treasure of love that I would never have availed myself of."

Finally, Sister G. expressed that she had learned "...How God expands people individuals in community. Being involved at a deeper level, emotionally and spiritually with every sister [in the convent]. And for me that is such a growing edge."

Brian and Cathi C. also drew from long years of experience in intentional community as they reflected on lessons learned. Brian said that being thus involved, "...calls you to a much deeper place in regard to community. And also [shows you] a much bigger picture of who God is."

Cathi continued, "And ...God shows Himself to be a supportive God, a gracious God in the many hands of your housemates. There's a fuller expression of grace and help and love – very practical love oftentimes, and some emotional love, too – that comes through when you've got more than just the nuclear family."

Worthy of note are various other lessons that individuals shared which were not categorized above: Mako of the Nightingale Community, as homeowner of the original house, reflected on the struggle of determining whether or not to ask an individual to leave the community. As he sought wisdom in this kind of circumstance he said that God had taught him important lessons about "the appropriate use of power."

Brian and Cathi C. also spoke of the need for personal boundaries even while in such close, intentional community. Cathi said, "There can also be a risk...because you've got people who are outside of your intimate spouse and children relationships that are there, and [see you] in your vulnerable times. So it's an added place to guard in a sense not in a fearful way, just an awareness of how you need to keep your intimate circle strong. It's a challenge sometimes." From their experience, no matter how close a community may be, the marital relationship needs to be continually shielded, as well as parental prerogatives.

### *Advice to the Church*

The last question that the interviewees were asked was what perspectives, principles or words of advice would they want to pass on to the church, based on their experience, which they think could help the rest of the Body of Christ in pursuing a rich experience of biblical community together.

Different interviewees naturally had different answers. Some responses were unique to themselves and others were echoed by others both inside and outside their own intentional community. Many answers echoed lessons that individuals shared in the previous section. These responses also seemed to reflect the various personalities, as well. Specifically, those individuals who seemed to have a big-picture or philosophical bend tended toward the philosophical/theological responses, and those with an apparently more down-to-earth, practical personalities expressed more practical, concrete and inter-relational responses.

It is also significant to mention that the founders or leaders of the given communities also tended toward the more theological and philosophical responses. A reasonable assumption, then, would be that since they are founders, their inspiration and call at least initially involved an enlightening of the mind in regard to the concept and call to community in the scriptures.

Answers to this question fell into three general categories: Philosophical or Theological Understanding, Interpersonal/Relational Principles, and Importance of Commitment. Specific statements of “advice” are italicized in the quotes below.

### Philosophical/theological understanding

The Nightingale Community was the one community which landed solidly in the *Missional* category on the Intentionality Scale and as such is strongly driven by the sense of being part of the larger mission of the Church in the world. The vision of the founder, Mako N. and the Community's Seven Core Values both reflect a strong commitment to and focus on mission. When asked about whether their priority in the community was "shared life" or "shared mission," Mako replied, "I think the shared life flows more out of the shared mission. To me there's a hierarchy of how I think about those things and that helps us really make decisions about how much of a shared life ought we to have, or is it helpful to have." In regard to the place and importance of interpersonal relationships he responded, "*I think our full healing and full sanctification take place in the context of mission.* It's my way of interpreting the gospel. Everything Jesus did was for the sake of training us for mission. So if we don't actually make choices in line with that, then we're being selfish somehow."

His wife and co-founder, Ming, shared a modified version of this same response by adding, "But you can have a community that empowers each *individual* mission. We also do that, because it's not like our sense of mission is only the things that we do together. We all have various senses of mission, whether it's in our jobs, or even in the community different ones of us are doing different things. So a community could have less of a shared mission than we have, and empower each individual to do various missions."

In keeping with his missional vision and philosophy of community, Mako shared the following perspective and advice for the church: “There are practical reasons just to do it—and you get to grow as a result. I think the suburban church, the tendency to assume that ministry is mono-cultural and it’s based out of stable families who own their homes and that we have to *create* community for them, I think that’s going to have to be increasingly outmoded. I’ve heard that 20-30 years from now, one out of three people will live in an urban slum. And now already one in six. So we have to learn how to do ministry in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural way that is really freeing up people to do creative things with their time and their money. And if not, then I don’t know what is going to happen. So I think the church really needs to do that.”

The Green House Community, founded by Lon S. and his wife, was one of two communities which fell solidly into the *Communal* category of the Intentionality Scale. The name itself was chosen to reflect the desire for the experience to be an incubator-like environment, intended to foster personal and spiritual growth. The community in and of itself has a strong focus on internal relationships (“living Christianly together”) as opposed to an outer, more missional focus, along with a minimum of amount of structure. (It is interesting to note, however, that the community still falls within a greater missional focus, as shared by Lon when recounting the story of how God led him to begin the community.<sup>30</sup>) Lon’s response to the question of what advice could be given to

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<sup>30</sup> “We really got some very clear vision for Boston. And that was clearly the Holy Spirit-led vision for Boston....so some pretty amazing things came to pass through that....My friend [he’d been praying with] had this very clear vision that this house was to be used for God and he said “that house” and we said, “are you sure?”... But there were all these things that were kind of amazing

Ming of the Nightingale Community also spoke about being available to others. *"The value of availability... I think there are certain things about living in community that facilitate that or maybe would make it more automatic. But even if we weren't 'living in community' with other people I would desire that for our lives in terms of availability for others in our church and for the sake of ministry."* In order to allow for this availability Sara K.<sup>34</sup> of the Mill Street House advised simply, *"Less programming"* and Jenn of the same house said, *"Opening your home to people: Hospitality."*

A second reflection from Ming had to do with attitudes toward others. *"Learn to receive other people as gifts, not as entitlements or as people we can hang onto. So being able to really receive their gifts to us as they're giving it.... There may be a time when God calls people on to various other ministries or missions or other stages in life. So needing to be able to be open-handed and receive at that time and be grateful for it, but also to be able to release when it's time."*

Finally, Catherine with the Society of Aiden and Hilda shared, *"Struggle and wrestle with the issues. Not let them go and not let them slide, and not let them build up into walls. It would be like nurturing marriage, I guess, or nurturing a committed relationship, where the 'we' certainly takes a great deal of priority over the 'I.'"* Parenthetically she added, *"But in order for it to be really healthy, and I think, godly, in exchange the 'I' is free, too."*

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<sup>34</sup> Sara K., interviewed by author, Beverly, MA, February 2, 2011.



## Importance of commitment

The term “intentionality” presumes a strong element of commitment. The fact that all of the individuals interviewed had or were living in such communities obviated this. Catherine H, spoke in the above section of being willing to wrestle and struggle with issues with one another. Ming N. admonished Christians to be “available” to others. Mark D. described living in true community as living “permeable lives” together. All of these stances require a solid, ongoing commitment.

Lisa of the Nightingale Community said, “I think one of the biggest issues that we have as a culture here is that everything moves us toward being independent of other people... It’s incredibly tempting to be insular.” She stressed, “If you’re not paddling upstream you’re being taken downstream” stressing the fact that unless we are committed to working on being open and reaching out, it will not happen.

And what about those in the church at large who are not able to change their physical circumstances to live in intentional Christian community? Brian C. of the Hall Hotel admitted that he’s been a bit “spoiled” by his long term experience in intentional community. After having seen all that God has done in his and others’ lives over the years he has lived in community, he challenged, “Well, they *can* change their physical circumstances. They *can* choose to sell their house, they *can* choose to relocate. They *can* choose to leave their job. Those are things we assume are non-negotiable. You can mess with the whole system if you *want* to! You can put this all on the altar and you can say, ‘God, is

that all mine or is it something that I've grabbed? Is this something that I'm only culturally encouraged to do?' So you can walk away from a job. I've done that. I've left different jobs...it's just something that you sometimes do. I'm not saying that everyone *has* to do that—it's not a have-to-do thing."

"But you decided that since you want to live in this certain way you will choose to make changes that will be pretty significant—to enable you to do it?" the interviewer asked.

"Yes. *It's never about what you have; it's about what has you.* And so that's part of it too. I can be just as possessed by what we're talking about now as someone could be possessed by their home or their car."

Final advice regarding the importance of commitment comes from members of the Community of Jesus. Prior to joining the Community of Jesus Barbara M. and her pastor husband had been affiliated with the founding group for many years, attending some of their earliest Bible studies before the residential community fully came into being. She commented on the attitude that the leaders had back then, which she and her husband sought to integrate into their own church.

"I think the overriding philosophy of the whole thing was based on the fact that *a church congregation, even though they're scattered all around, if people want it, can become a family in Christ together. There is a commonality of life that can happen in a local church. But you have to commit yourself to it. And you have to have a hunger for more than you already have in your Christian experience.*" Citing their efforts at their church she recounted, "We just started

with simple things, like discussion groups, which became sharing groups, which became caring groups, which became like having family and going picnicking together. Then the kids started learning by seeing the way we were living. Then would go on weeklong retreats together. *In varying groups in the church you can have like a microcosm of community even among people who don't live very near each other, if their heart is bent in the direction of wanting this and being hungry for this kind of thing. It is possible that they can catch a vision."*

Philosophically speaking, Barbara reflected "I think I would encourage the church as a body to really look on the fact that they're on a pilgrimage together. And to the extent which they share their lives together, God will multiply the graces that He has and will bring forth new life. That *it really is worth taking the time to get to know each other and to share life together and to let Christ come into the middle of that mix. It's a group pilgrimage and people are there together for a reason.* I do truly believe that. No matter how far geographically they're spread they're together."

To cap the focus on commitment, fellow Community of Jesus member, Brother B. advised, *"I would say find the structure that God has for that particular church and jump in with both feet! Total commitment. It is worth gold!"*

### Synthesizing Strengths

What are the particular strengths of these communities? What stands out in regard to good principles to live by as the Body of Christ? What are they able to find in their Christian experience that may be stronger than what the average

the church in regard to apprehending biblical community was as follows: *"[I would tell the church to realize]... that life comes from relationships. God speaks life into His living creation. And so relationships are really the currency of the Kingdom. I'd say pay attention to that: Life comes from relationships; it's all about relationships. Whatever you're going to do in the church it's got to be about that."*

Concerns have been raised that there could be a problem with "elitism" in regard to the attitudes of those living intentional community.<sup>31</sup> Either community members could be tempted to consider themselves better or "more spiritual" than other Christians, or, non-members could fear that they themselves are spiritually inferior or are being excluded by the other – reflecting a sort of Christian caste system.

With this in mind, another piece of advice shared by Cathi C., co-leader/host of the Hall Hotel shared a balancing view. She said, *"I also think it's entirely okay for people to have seasons of different kinds of community."* She related that she believed that at various stages of life—particularly for newly-married couple learning to be together, as well as for those beginning to raise children, that living in such intense, intentional, close community might not be the best thing at these tender stages. If people in these situations did choose to live in community during these times, that there would need to be certain spatial and relational boundaries that were clearly articulated between them and the rest of

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happening there. And then it was in the context of these remarkable things happening that we were being confronted with these issues of community. I kind of tend to be slow to act because it took about 2 or 3 years after this initial very clear message that we couldn't avoid....I remember one time just praying together with my friend and we both started chuckling because, 'We've got this message, Lord, but surely You've got the wrong people. We're just not communitarians!'"

<sup>31</sup> This objection or concern was expressed by two people upon sharing the concept of this thesis.

the household in order to protect the marital relationship, and the emerging parenting style of the couples.<sup>32</sup>

Brian C. of the Hall Hotel shared this perspective: *"[People should understand] that God is the one who invented community, the One who is and really makes community happen."* Cathi expanded, *"It's His intention that we not be individual, and are more complete when we are with others. First with Himself, and then also with others. Others bring out the best in us as well as what we'd really like to see changed about ourselves—the hard things about ourselves."*

Finally, Beth M., co-founder of the Mill Street House, a community which fell primarily into the Monastic quadrant of the Intentionality Scale, expressed, *"The monastic movement is a distinct call within the church that is a minority call. We're not trying to replace a local church."* She and her husband, Mark, also both emphasized that there not be any kind of elitism imposed or implied for those choosing to live in intentional community.

#### Interpersonal/relational principles

Interpersonal principles could be broken down into two areas: Advice for attitudes and advice for actions. Some shared one, some the other, and many shared both in their statements of advice.

Sarah N.<sup>33</sup> from the Hall Hotel advised both attitude and action, *"Two things: One, being open to be vulnerable within a community. Because I feel that once someone starts to show their real self—that speaks really powerfully to the*

<sup>32</sup> This would be a good topic for further study and research.

<sup>33</sup> Sarah N. interviewed by author, Boston, MA, March 3, 2011.

group about it being a safe place.” This was echoed by other interviewees, specifically Mark D. of the Mill Street House, who stated, “Community is nothing if not having a permeable life.”

In regard to action, Sara counseled, *“Being intentional about loving people and knowing how to meet other people’s needs. To seek to love and not to be loved; knowing that all of that comes from Christ anyway. God will provide if you are seeking that, but these two things for sure.”*

Sister G. of the Community of Jesus had a similar response. *“Try to be open with each other, which means sharing your need with others. Trusting that God will meet your needs through others and will speak through other people.”* Barbara M. from the same community echoed this: “A big part of this is that *you also have to be willing to express your need to one another.* That can burst the whole thing open when people can begin to express their personal, emotional needs to each other.”

Lisa of the Nightingale Community shared a couple pieces of advice: *“Be more flexible and available to other people, [but also] draw boundaries when you need to.”* Also, *“Be willing to stick it out with people over the long term.”*

In regard to attitudes toward others, Jessica of the Green House said, *“Be slow to judge; be very skeptical before you know the whole picture of another person’s motivation behind things.”* Similar to this, and yet a bit surprising considering the accepted closeness of living together, Mark D. of Mill Street House advised, *“Tolerance. Give people space.”*

church person may experience? The assumption is that by living in closer proximity to one another as Christians the more opportunity we have to intermingle and have “iron sharpen iron” (Prov 27:17). The New Testament shows in Acts 2:42-47 how the early, New Testament church lived and grew together. Modern society does not easily lend itself to such closeness and intentionality. We will first summarize the findings for each area of question:

### *Guiding motivations*

People in our study were moved to begin or join intentional Christian communities for reasons of simple economics, previous exposure or involvement, perceived or awakened sense of inner need, biblical conviction and/or inner sense of divine call, seriousness of shared devotion.

While all of these reasons carried their own weight, it was the *seriousness of shared devotion* that seemed to be the biggest and widest spread motivator. This serves as an example to the church of the importance of our Christian identity and living expanding into all areas of our lives—even as close as our own homes and households. Jesus said “Truly I tell you, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. (Mark 10:29-30). He also said, “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.” (Mark 8:35)

In our culture it is considered a great sacrifice to give up our individuality in order to cultivate community. It means giving up some privacy, time, convenience, and even material possessions (depending on how far the community goes toward having a common purse). Clearly these people consider it worth it to be able to more fully experience Kingdom life together. If it takes sacrifice on the part of people living in such close proximity to apprehend more biblical community, so it will also take at least a similar degree of sacrifice for the rest of the Body of Christ to do the same when *not* living together. People need to have strong conviction and motivation to seek closer relationships, but it can be done. Intentional community is not just limited to those who live together. Intentionality is needed to “live into” the inheritance we have in Christ on this earth.

### *Structure and rule*

What does it take to create an environment where believers may be able to better apprehend close fellowship and a shared sense of mission? Among the communities interviewed there were various structures and rules from high structure (including those with liturgy and structured worship) to low (one weekly meeting). This survey inspired the development of the *Intentionality Scale*, diagramming the spectrum of varying degrees of Structure (high to low) compared in contrast to Internal versus External focus (see diagram, below.)

This scale could be used as a helpful tool to describe the functioning of various intentional communities and could potentially be helpful to people in



communities or those considering designing new communities in understanding or determining where they stand in regard to their mission, as well as what they feel they need or want in terms of structure or organization.

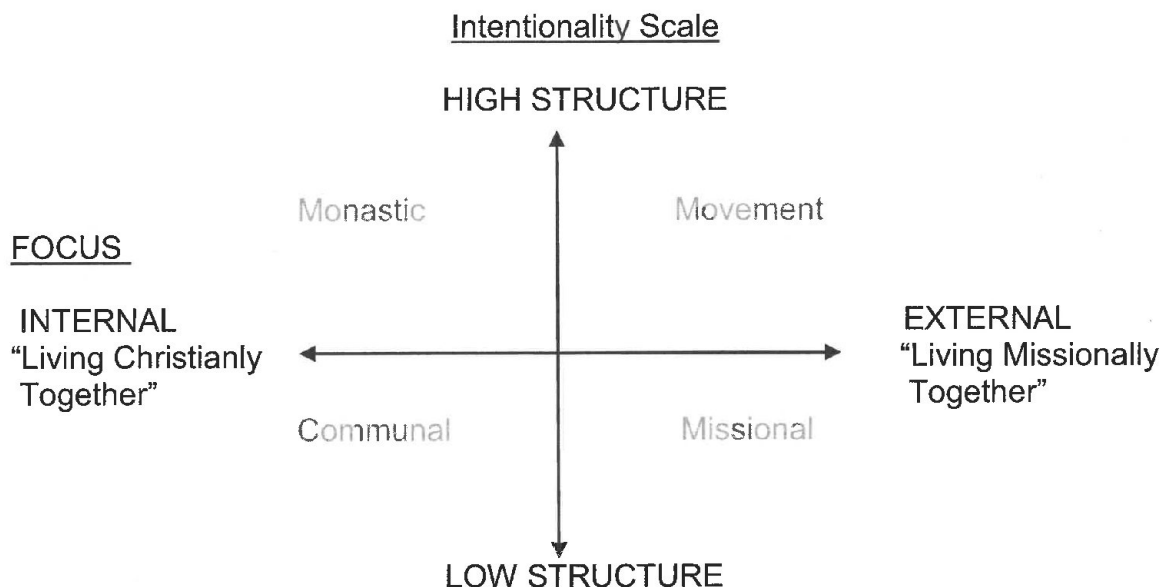


Figure 4-2: The Intentionality Scale

What can be learned from this is that there are a great variety of rules and structures that intentional communities can take, depending on the visions and preferences of the founders and members. What matters is that in the context of intentionality that *some* kind of structure and rules be developed and implemented to help define and guide the community as to its identity and to serve its focus and/or foci. This is certainly true of the church—or any organization—in general. This means that apprehending a more biblical sense of community can be aided by the development and implementation of an identity and structure to help serve the vision and goals. For those in the church seeking to experience more community, it means that there should be some kind of a plan and supporting structure to accomplish this. For those in intentional

community that clearly involved moving in together and developing guidelines for community life (such as finances, worship, outreach, relationships, etc.). For “regular” church people this could mean the gathering of a group of like-minded individuals who agree in certain values and goals and who also agree on a method of pursuing them. Again, this would involve strong motivation and conviction, followed by clear acts of intentionality to begin to take steps to bring this about – whether or not it involved actually moving into the same or adjacent households.

### *Guiding scriptures*

Motivating and guiding scriptures shared by community members fell into three general areas: community/relational life, need and degree of spiritual commitment, and missional focus. As might be expected, answers were weighted more toward where the community fell on the *Intentionality Scale*, i.e. those with a more communal or monastic focus mentioned more scriptures relating to community and relational life, and the more missional community shared scriptures with a more missional focus. Need and degree of spiritual commitment seemed to be shared equally.

A wide variety of scriptures were cited, as delineated earlier in this paper; however, consistent were verses and passages from the book of Ephesians. Notable also were selections of scripture verses which had been used by community members to remind and encourage one another: 1 Corinthians 13 which speaks of what love truly is, and the “One Another’s” (see Appendix D) a

compiled list of all scripture exhorting and stating how believers are to treat one another. Lon S. of the Green House said, “[We saw] the collected view and design God had and how we’re pretty acculturated, independent people [in this culture], and so we kept feeling that *the scripture was saying things that only made sense much more in a community of faith.*” Once people catch a vision of God’s intention for them as a body and family in Christ, it seems that all it takes – along with a reliance on God for the results—is being intentional to move forward in helping bring it about.

### *Definition of community*

There were a variety of definitions or descriptions shared. Some focused more on the shared experience – “supporting one another,” “common worship,” “sacred friendships”—while others focused more on one’s personal attitude within the community—“living an unvarnished life,” “permeability,” “not thinking of yourself.” Others were a combination: “vertical and horizontal commitment—to God and to one another,” and “shared life and shared mission.” Poignant experiences related were commonly stories of mutual love and support in crisis, sharing of gifts, and the feeling of family. While every individual and group interviewed shared such stories, those communities which had a strong liturgical aspect (Community of Jesus and Mill Street House) as well as the strongest in missional focus (Nightingale Community) shared definitions and examples which clearly included those emphases.

## Challenges

Three areas were identified where community members related problems or potential problems. First was when individuals' exhibited a *lack of commitment to the community*—either to relationships within the group and/or to its purpose or external mission. This was evidenced by habitually withdrawing into their room(s) and/or not attending community functions, be it worship, outreach or fellowship. Other community members expressed disappointment and distress when this happened.

The second area was that of *negative attitudes* within individuals. Top on the list was arrogance or pride. When allowed to build it leads to insensitivity, alienation and un-reconciliation. Other related attitudes were narcissism, resistance to vulnerability and/or a rejection of the idea of vulnerability (considered frailty), materialism, individualism, holding grudges, and gossip. All of these were said to contribute to a greater potential for conflict as well as contributed to ineffective handling of conflict.

The third identified issue was that of *idealism*—a double-edged sword: Idealism provided strong, initial motivation to embark on the path of intentional Christian community, yet also created potential for disillusionment with the actual experience. Because either relationships in the group or the guiding mission of the community are not being realized fast enough or in the way that an individual might expect or demand, interviewees related that people could become frustrated, angry and eventually disillusioned. Disillusioned people can conclude that there is either something wrong with their particular group or with the

concept of the possibility being able to apprehend authentic community at all—and so they either become critical or eventually leave.

Lack of commitment, negative attitudes, idealism—these can all lead to conflict within a community, be it an intentional, co-housing community or in the church in general. From these interviews it appears that the interpersonal and ideological challenges which face intentional communities are virtually the same. This can, in a paradoxical way, give hope to the church, understanding that the challenges which face them are not absent in such communities, and conversely, the paths to the solutions can also be the apprehended. It can also bring a greater sense of realism to both the church and the intentional communities as they understand that while utopias are not possible, progress and growth are available to both as they seek to become more conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29).

### *Conflict*

Because there are challenges in every group, and because every human being struggles with selfish attitudes and perspectives, conflict within a community is inevitable. All intentional community members interviewed acknowledged this. In the words of Lon S. of the Green House, facing and working through conflict are a part of the “implied structural commitment” of each of these intentional communities. Looking at it from a positive angle, these communities actively seek to “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3).

Key to healthy addressing and resolution of conflict is the commitment made by community members to do so. Part of the ethos of each intentional community was to proactively face struggles and differences and learn to work them through individually and together. A clear commitment to facing and engaging in conflict resolution is therefore a hallmark of healthy intentional communities.

Within the local church a common complaint is that members, rather than facing and dealing with conflict, tend to either fight or flee. As Ken Sande describes it, people are either peace-fakers or peace-breakers. Without the kind of commitment that those in successful intentional communities often have, relationships within the Body of Christ will continue to be conflicted, problems remain unresolved and the mission of the Church compromised. Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35).

### *Lessons learned*

Lessons learned by the variety of community groups and individuals interviewed expressed some central themes. Personal lessons included understanding and growth in humility, in large part due to learning to accept and value differences, as well as learning to moderate idealism with realism. Spiritually and theologically, people reported the birth or growth of a strong conviction that God's design is for all of His children to experience this kind of close, committed community among themselves. It should be noted that this

conviction did not necessarily include the belief that *all* Christians should live in such co-housing or planned communities; rather, it was the *quality* of commitment and closeness between individuals that was emphasized.

The reader will remember that the five primary communities interviewed fell into the following categories: *Monastic* (high structure, high internal focus, like the Community of Jesus and partially the Mill Street House); *Movement* (high structure, high external focus, which none of the communities fell squarely into); *Communal* (low structure, high internal focus, like the Green House and Hall Hotel); and *Missional* (low structure, high external focus, like the Nightingale Community).

The solidly Monastic community (the Community of Jesus') responses focused more on the love of God and personal growth through community. The more Communal communities both focused on conviction of God's design for close community, as well as humility and realism. Both kinds of responses reflected the more inward or "living Christianly together" focus in the left side of the chart. The more Missional community's responses had more to do with the challenges of living in community and humility in relation to others. This focus on external and relational challenges might be influenced by their more "living missionally together" focus.

A closer look at these responses as well as follow-up interviews might indeed show a correlation between kinds of community and the kind of growth that they foster in the members, and as such could be a topic for further research.

Taken together, it can be summarized that the lessons learned by individuals living in intentional community center around:

1. A deeper understanding of God and His love, reflected and illustrated in the lives of others;
2. A deepening of personal humility and a greater appreciation for the gifts and contributions of others; and
3. A deeper conviction and commitment therefore, to closer, committed relationships in the Body of Christ.

These lessons as shared by community members are motivation in and of themselves to encourage the church at large to intentionally pursue the kind of community illustrated and exhorted in the scriptures.

### *Lessons to share*

There was a wealth of information shared in both lessons learned and lessons shared. Moving along the path from personal insights to discerning principles to share with the larger Body of Christ, interviewees responses centered on philosophical or theological understanding that they wished to impart, interpersonal and relational principles shared, and stressing of the importance of intentional commitment.

Poignant principles included the central importance of relationships, the “currency of the Kingdom” to quote Lon S. of the Green House.

[I would tell the church to realize]... that life comes from relationships. God speaks life into His living creation. And so relationships are really the currency of the Kingdom. I'd say pay attention to that: Life comes from relationships; it's all



about relationships. Whatever you're going to do in the church it's got to be about that.

In regard to the concept of community in general Brian and Cathi C. of the Hall Hotel emphasized that God is the creator and designer of community (emphasis the author).

[People should understand] that God is the one who invented community, the One who is and really makes community happen.

It's His intention that we not be individual, and are more complete when we are with others. First with Himself, and then also with others. Others bring out the best in us as well as what we'd really like to see changed about ourselves—the hard things about ourselves.

It's never about what you have; it's about what has you.

In regard to the interface of mission and community, Mako and Ming N. of the Nightingale Community:

I think our full healing and full sanctification take place in the context of mission... We have to learn how to do ministry in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural way that is really freeing up people to do creative things with their time and their money.

In regard to relational principles to live by, various quotes from Community of Jesus members and others:

Be open to be vulnerable within a community.

Be intentional about loving people and knowing how to meet other people's needs. To seek to love and not to be loved; knowing that all of that comes from Christ anyway.

Try to be open with each other, which means sharing your need with others. Trusting that God will meet your needs through others and will speak through other people.

Be more flexible and available to other people, [but also] draw boundaries when you need to." Also, "Be willing to stick it out with people over the long term.

Be slow to judge...

Learn to receive other people as gifts, not as entitlements or as people we can hang onto.

Struggle and wrestle with the issues. Not let them go and not let them slide, and not let them build up into walls.

Community is nothing if not having permeable lives.

The value of availability"... "Less programming"... "Opening your home to people: Hospitality.

In regard to commitment, the encouragement from Barbara M., Brother B. and others from the Community of Jesus was that the church at large can indeed experience more authentic community together:

[The Church should] really look on the fact that they're on a pilgrimage together. It really is worth taking the time to get to know each other and to share life together and to let Christ come into the middle of that mix. It's a group pilgrimage and people are there together for a reason.

A church congregation, even though they're scattered all around, if people want it, can become a family in Christ together. There is a commonality of life that can happen in a local church. But you have to commit yourself to it. And you have to have a hunger for more than you already have in your Christian experience.

I would say find the structure that God has for that particular church and jump in with both feet! Total commitment. It is worth gold!

## Summary

What are the strengths of the intentional community and how can they help the Body of Christ at large?

1. Inspiration. They can serve as examples of those who are determined to pursue “living together Christianly” as well as “living together missionally.” By having an articulated and shared focus individuals engaged in intentional community are able to pursue together what each of them believes in individually. There is strength in numbers as they seek to “spur one another on to love and good works.” (Heb. 10:24)

2. Focus and Commitment. The power of knowing why they are there and what they are seeking.

3. Efficacy. They have a greater likelihood of apprehending what they are reaching for because of their intentionality and commitment.

4. Healthy Relationships. Their commitment to healthy relationships is most evidenced by their commitment to *facing conflict*. Successful intentional communities have clear guidelines for and commitment to dealing with conflict because of scripture and because they know that they cannot live in such close quarters or meaningfully accomplish any kind of a joint mission, without doing so.

The church can be inspired to face conflicts more courageously and proactively by observing and learning from those who more regularly practice healthy conflict management and resolution. Fears can be allayed as they observe that conflict, rather than tearing people apart as is often feared, instead has great power to bring people even closer together when dealt with biblically.

Whether members of the Church decide to live physically in community together or not, the clear message from those who do is that they can live in meaningful, deep and authentic community together *as long as they will commit themselves to do so*. Having a plan – in whatever form it may take—coupled with an unwavering commitment to God and one another through godly and harmonious relationships will enable the Church to move closer to apprehending the experience and influence of biblical community that God designed her to have. By making this kind of commitment the contemporary Body of Christ in North America can experience for themselves the qualities and power of community which our New Testament brothers and sisters experienced in Acts 2:42-47:

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles... Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

## CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### Restatement of the Need

People were made for community. From the beginning of Creation God said it is not good for man to be alone, and He created people to be in relationship with one another, living and growing together in interacting communities of individuals and families. Throughout history people have identified themselves with and by the communities of which they are a part, from their family groups to their towns, regions and nations. Christian believers are a subset within the communities of man, those identified by their membership in the family of the Creator God—ones who not only share their human ancestry with the rest of mankind, but who have also become reconnected spiritually with their Heavenly Father through the work of His Son, their Savior. Theirs is a higher, more primary community membership, one that ascends above and extends beyond human bloodlines, a line traced by the sacrifice of Jesus' atoning blood.

While in this fallen world, relationships between human beings will always be affected by sin. As a result there is bound to be regular or periodic strife between people in the best of families and in the best of communities. While our families and communities are meant to help give us positive understanding and acceptance of who we are, our own and others' sins more often serve to enforce in us the opposite. As a result we clamor in our hearts for affirmation and

justification—but we often seek these through unhealthy and illegitimate means.<sup>1</sup> We end up harming ourselves in various ways and our sense of alienation from God, ourselves and from one another is intensified.

When a person returns to God through saving faith in Jesus, they have a chance to start over. In Christ and guided by His Word and Spirit we begin to unlearn unhealthy ways of relating and replace them with healthy ones. Coming to Christ involves being honest with ourselves and with God about our sins, along with a willingness to relinquish wrong ways and to be changed for the better. Because of the depth and breadth of our fallenness, complete change is a process which will continue throughout our lifetime.<sup>2</sup> With each incidence of repentance, cleansing, realignment and transformation<sup>3</sup> we can trust that we are being changed more and more into the image of our Lord<sup>4</sup> whose character we were originally intended to reflect.<sup>5</sup>

This transformation and redefinition happens on a corporate level, as well. Just as in a society, belief or behavior of the majority of people defines the general character of that society, in the same way the belief and behavior of Christians in the Family of God is intended to increasingly reflect the character of the Father.

In chapter one, we spoke of the current state of North American society in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. The Industrial Revolution drove a wedge between home life and work life. The mainstreaming of atheistic

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 2:13.

<sup>2</sup> Philippians 1:6.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 1:9; Romans 12:2.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 8:9; 2 Corinthians 3:18.

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 1:26.

Evolutionism diminished the understanding of the value of human beings. The Sexual Revolution brought a surge of sexual idolatry and broken marriages and families. More recently, exploding advances in technology have created opportunities to be even more disconnected to one another through the illusion of virtual connectedness. Lack of familial and social cohesiveness has eroded people's sense of identity and belonging. Much like a wounded and disillusioned child whose parents have divorced, people in today's society don't really know what to believe or in whom to trust. Despair drives them to seek escape or to believe in anything that seems to work or feel good, if only for the moment. When absolutes are eschewed and multiple truths are attempted to be embraced, people's need for rootedness, belonging, identity, permanency, security and connectedness languish increasingly more.

Christians are not immune to the spirit of our age. Although we may intellectually know the truth of our identity in Christ and belonging in the family of God, we still are subject to the cacophony of voices all around us telling us what will make for meaning and satisfaction in our lives. The pace of our contemporary society puts a great many strains on us in regard to how we use our time and the priorities that we choose. If we are not careful, although we may not end up believing as the rest of our frenzied and disconnected society does, we may end up living as if we do.

Society in every age has had its beauty and strengths as well as its challenges, pitfalls and idols. Christians in every society and every age have also needed to uniquely navigate the given waters they are in, as they seek to live as

fully and as faithfully possible before God and their fellow man. As we have seen from the example of believers throughout history, brothers and sisters have sought to pursue lives of faithfulness and fruitfulness from both within the church and without, and from within society and from the fringes of it. Where they have succeeded not only have generations of believers been inspired to seek and serve God more fervently, but the fruit of their witness has often improved society overall, bringing seasons of spiritual renewal.

### The Resource: Christian Community

As much if not more than any time in history these postmodern times call for Christians to live out in clear and tangible ways their identity as the Body of Christ, the Family of God. This would be not only for our own good, but for the good of those around us in need of finding answers to the questions of why to live and how to live.

Much societal good has come about through the efforts and witness of believers down through history. Integral to this influence has been believers commitment to forming and cultivating, healthy, biblical relationships characterized by love, honesty and reconciliation. Some believers moved to the margins of society to cultivate lives of devotion and communal harmony while others created enclaves of intentional community in the midst of society. Yet, the opportunity and capacity to experience the quality and depth of *koinonia* that God intended for His people is by no means limited to these settings. God has given His people His Word—from the Law and prophets to Jesus Christ and the



apostles—and the degree to which believers will be able to apprehend the peaceful fruit of righteousness and harmony that God has promised to characterize community in His kingdom will be directly proportional to the degree to which they earnestly seek to understand and follow His scriptural commands.

The veracity of this assertion is confirmed by the testimony of those who have sought and who seek it. In chapter four we listened to the reflections and responses of people currently living in intentional Christian communities. We discovered that the primary motivating factor for Christians to band together into intentional community was the *seriousness of shared devotion*. These individuals sincerely desired to have their lives be centered on loving God and following His ways. By banding together with likeminded others they believed that they would be able to better realize this goal by mutually supporting and reinforcing one another through living together. While they report that they certainly encounter struggles and obstacles, it was confirmed that they also believe that their shared commitment and living arrangements did indeed bring the support and enrichment that they had hoped for.

In reflecting on challenges or obstacles they encountered which threatened their full apprehension of *koinonia*, interviewees' responses all centered on attitudinal and relational problems. Lack or loss of commitment to relationships and/or mutually-shared goals, negative attitudes toward conflict and resistance to resolution, as well as disappointed or disgruntled idealism all made for conflict and strained relationships. As respondents shared lessons learned in community—such as finding a deeper understanding of God's love in and

through one another, deeper humility and appreciation of the gifts of others, and a strengthened conviction of the design and need for committed relationships—it is clear that these are the fruit of having worked these difficult interpersonal issues through successfully.

Therefore, it is most likely that the solid commitment of individuals to engage in facing and working through differences and conflict would be key to successful growth and movement toward deeper *koinonia*. Those communities that make facing and engaging and working through conflict part of their stated expectations, commitment and practice for all of their members put themselves in the position to overcome the normal and regular interpersonal obstacles and difficulties that will come their way. They will also become self-repairing communities who are built up, deepened and enriched through every successful conflict addressed and resolved.

This principle and opportunity is the same for believers who don't live in intentional community. Those living in intentional community stand out because of their unique living arrangements and interpersonal commitments. But it is believed that "regular" churchgoing Christians can also experience the same quality *koinonia* by making similar commitments and following the same principles, even while they do not live together. As one interviewee said, "There is a commonality of life that can happen in a local church. But you have to commit yourself to it. And you have to have a hunger for more than you already have in your Christian experience."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Brother B. of the Community of Jesus.

## The Pathway: Conflict Strategies

### *A Decision to be Made*

A starting point for this is for leaders in the local church to decide to take seriously the interpersonal relational aspect of the Kingdom and to practice and teach regularly about it. The gospel is all about restoring broken relationships—with God, with ourselves, and with others. This is important to remember because the world around us continually tells us that nearly everything else is more important. Relationships are not merely the trimmings of the Kingdom, but as another interviewee stressed “relationships are the currency of the Kingdom.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, major themes that should be taught to new believers and church members as well as regularly reinforced with all members would include:

- 1) A Theology of Personhood (people made in the image of God, fallen but loved) followed by teaching about Christians’ identity in and as the Body of Christ (life as His redeemed people);
- 2) A Theology of Community—emphasizing the unity of God and harmony within the Trinity, and God’s intent for His people to reflect the same;
- 3) Studies in Kingdom Relationships—biblical teaching on how we are to relate to one another within the Family of God (e.g. a study of Ephesians and the “one anothers” of scripture);
- 4) Scriptural teaching on Peacemaking, emphasizing the need to follow Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 5 and 18 in facing and engaging with conflict—with the goal of reconciliation and restoration. (Resources from Peacemaker and other ministries could be integrated here.)

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<sup>7</sup> Lon S. of the Green House.

Next but just as importantly, church leaders must also *model* healthy relationships in the Family of God. This would involve practicing peacemaking in their own friendships, marriages and families—as well as in their relationships with all other fellow believers. We must be willing to get our hands and hearts dirty (or clean as it were) and delve into the sticky business of working things out with one another as problems arise. For many this will also involve an intentional commitment to do this with a small core group of people to whom we are committed where we can learn, practice and grow in the skill and conviction of these principles. Then we can take what we are learning and the skills we are developing and not only share them with others but have them serve as validation of our spiritual character and message.

Supporting this would be a commitment on the part of church leadership to increase their level of openness with others about their own struggles and weaknesses. While this certainly would need to be done wisely and judiciously it is probably more true that church communities suffer more from a *lack* of openness—or the right kind of openness—than they do from being *too* open.

The point to be made is simply that people follow the example of their leaders. If leaders are honest about their weaknesses and mistakes it gives members permission to do the same. “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed.” (James 5:16) The example of leaders who are willing to face their mistakes and seek forgiveness and restoration can be far more powerful than their actual teaching on the subject.

Finally, a decision must also be made as to what kind of community a given church wishes to be. Use of the Intentionality Scale could be helpful at this point as a tool to help individuals, leaders, and ultimately congregations conceptualize the kind of community that they have—or wish to have—in terms of structure and focus. Serving as a springboard for discussion, leaders can share and discuss their perceptions, convictions and desires as to how they envision their particular body of believers to function in both relationships and mission. While they may not choose to call themselves a monastic, communal, missional or movement-type church or community of believers, these distinctions can help inform the discussion. The categories in the Intentionality Scale could also be used by small group leaders to help them consider how they desire their small groups to be structured and focused.

Other considerations could be added to the discussion. One would be the stage of life or spiritual maturity of members of the congregation, which would bring differing expectations and desires in regard to degree of closeness in relationships. Another factor to consider would be the church vision or mission statement, which would both reflect and/or affect how the church sees itself or believes itself to be in terms of its internal or external focus.

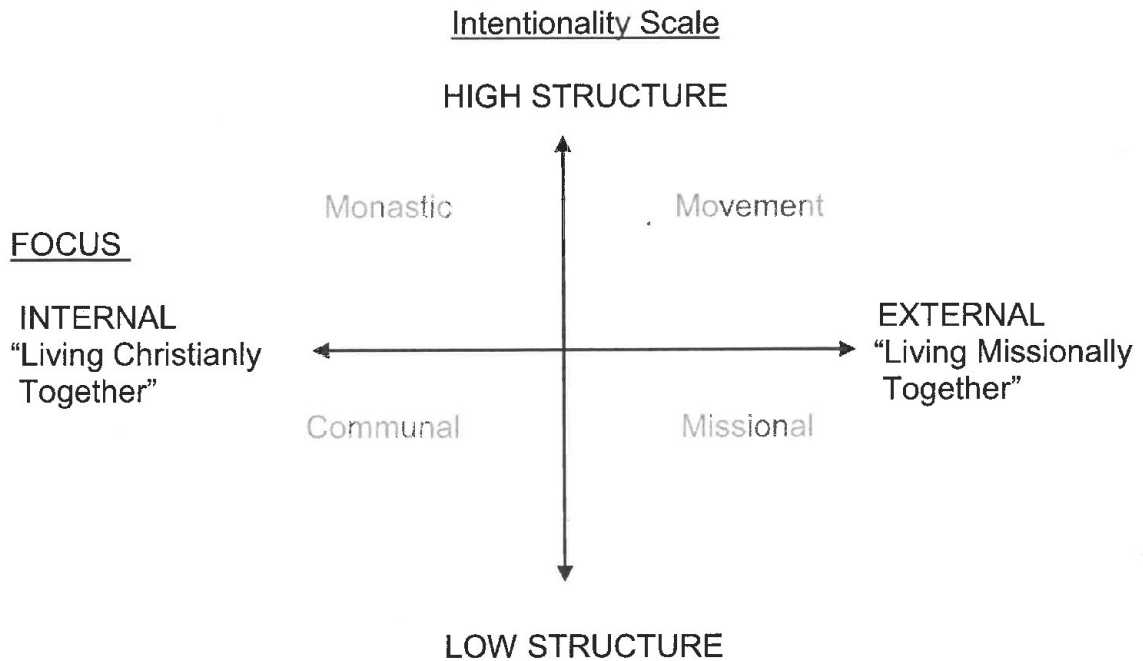


Figure 5-1. Intentionality Scale

### *A Process to Follow*

It is recommended that church leaders develop and articulate a process for dealing with conflict within the congregation. While many churches have wisely put processes in place for the exercise of church discipline, they would also do well to have a statement and description of a biblical process for dealing with conflict in general, which is both available and regularly reviewed before the congregation. This would result in people being more likely to refer to the process in church affairs but especially to remember to follow conflict engagement and principles of reconciliation in their everyday relationships. Peacemaker Ministries offers a good example of biblically based process and principles in their *Peacemaker's Pledge* (see Appendix. G).

The causes of conflicts as well as principles for dealing with them are the same on the individual level (between friends, spouses, etc.) as they are on the corporate level (family, organization, congregation, community). As people learn to work through problems on one level it will build their strength and ability to be able to do so in subsequent and more complex levels.

Since church members are always at different stages of maturity and understanding, at certain critical junctures where their knowledge or ability is lacking they will need assistance and resources. Therefore it would be ideal to have a small group of experienced, knowledgeable, mature leaders in the church specializing in healthy conflict engagement who would act as resources to teach and guide those on the way. Having principles and a process which the congregation has agreed upon to seek to follow will help encourage and undergird those who are struggling to learn and grow in this area. Peacemaker Ministries recommends forming a Peacemaking Team in each church which is entrusted with the continual encouragement and support of the congregation in this area, undergirded by the teaching and text of Ken Sande's book *The Peacemaker*.

### *Maintaining a Meta-Perspective*

Finally, it is important for pastors and ministry leaders to become adept at understanding the function of the church and of ministries and communities as systems. With the help of systems concepts they will be able to develop perspectives and approaches to conflict as well as hone and refine their skills in

engaging with and resolving it. Conflict within any system almost always has multiple interlocking layers and it is important for leaders to learn to recognize patterns of functioning, both healthy and dysfunctional.

The existence of anxiety and conflict always bring with them the potential for leaders to react and lose perspective, hindering them from understanding and responding in truly helpful ways to difficult people and situations. The following is a chart of paradigms and concepts taken from systems thinking and theory introduced in chapter three of this paper to which ministry leaders may refer to help them build and maintain a necessary meta-perspective. As these perspectives are born in mind leaders will be able to attend more to the processes within the church family rather than getting lost in the issues, as they seek pathways and approaches to facing conflict – and cultivating *koinonia* - within their contexts.

SYSTEMS CONCEPT	DEFINITION & APPLICATION
<b>Becoming a Learning Organization</b> (From Peter Senge, <i>The Fifth Discipline: The Art &amp; Practice of Learning Organization</i> )	The purpose of an enterprise is to grow through learning. We learn as we listen to feedback from throughout the system. It is good for pastors and leaders to see the church as a system which improves as it responds to issues, rather than defensively reacting to or misdiagnosing problems.
<b>Automatic Processes (anxiety)</b> (From Peter Steinke, <i>Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What</i> )	Leaders do well to remember that there is normal, free-floating anxiety endemic to every system. It brings with it a constant potential for thoughtless reactivity—an automatic process. Leaders need to



	<p>seek to maintain a calm, non-reactive stance when facing conflict and not to let their own automatic processes (visceral reactions) take over.</p>
<p><b>Separateness vs. Closeness Change vs. Stability</b> (From Stevens &amp; Collins, <i>The Equipping Pastor: A Systems Approach to Congregational Leadership</i>, Family of Families chart. p. 79)</p>	<p>The authors measure churches by degree of cohesion and flexibility that they possess. Of particular note is the degree of dependence and independence, with the goal of <b><i>flexible interdependence</i></b>.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> <u>High Cohesion</u>      DEPENDENT      Lemmic Church      Nomadic Church  <u>Low Flexibility</u>      <u>High Flexibility</u>      RIGID      CHAOTIC      Synchronic Church      Atomistic Church  <u>Low Cohesion</u>      INDEPENDENT   </p>
<p><b>Transformation Process:</b> (From Lindgren &amp; Shawchuck, <i>Management for your Church: How to Revitalize Your Church Potential through a Systems Approach</i>, p.84.)</p>	<p>There are three internal processes in a system which combine and interact:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Theological/Missional Purposes</u>,</li> <li>2. <u>Organizational Structure</u>, and</li> <li>3. <u>Interpersonal Relationships</u>.</li> </ol> <p>When problems occur they likely stem from a need to adjust or make improvements in one or more of these areas. Ministry leaders do well to seek to identify to which of these areas a problem relates. Issues centering on interpersonal relationships are best addressed by following scriptural guidelines and using conflict resolution skills.</p>

<b>Bowen Family Systems concepts:</b> (From <a href="http://www.thebowencenter.org/pages/theory.html">http://www.thebowencenter.org/pages/theory.html</a> )	These concepts will help leaders look at the functioning patterns of the whole, even as they observe and attend to the parts.
<b>Self-Differentiation</b>	People need to be able to maintain their own identity, even while being valued parts of the whole. Healthy boundaries should be supported.
<b>Nuclear Family Emotional System</b>	This involves both the spoken and unspoken “rules” of how to relate (characterized by four basic relational patterns: marital conflict, dysfunction in one spouse, impairment of one or more children, and emotional distance). Leaders must remember that believers carry into the Family of God the same patterns of functioning from their family of origin—usually unrecognized. All members of the Body need to recognize and unlearn destructive patterns and replace them with healthy, biblical perspectives and practices.
<b>Family Projection Process</b>	This is a three-step process by which parents transmit their own emotional problems to their children: (1) the parent focuses on a child out of fear that something is wrong with the child; (2) the parent interprets the child's behavior as confirming the fear; and (3) the parent treats the child as if something is really wrong with the child.

	As “parents” in the church, leaders must be aware of their own potential to project their own weaknesses and fears onto the congregants. They also must encourage members to avoid doing the same.
<b>Multigenerational Transmission Process</b>	This is where unaddressed unhealthy patterns of relating are passed on and intensified in each subsequent generation. The same is true for generations of a church community.
<b>Societal Emotional Process</b>	This describes the ways in which non-family groups and social organizations can operate in a healthy or unhealthy manner. It is important to recognize that church and community members are strongly affected by these, as well.
<b>Triangulation</b>	An unhealthy version of this is where one or both of two people or entities in a conflict focus on pulling another person or entity in, thus shifting the tension and moving the attention away from themselves.
<b>Emotional Cutoff</b>	Cutting off a relationship or relationships— a dysfunctional way of handling tension between members. (akin to Sande’s passive “peace-faking” or active “peace-breaking”).
<b>Sibling Position</b>	Based on the research of Walter Toman, this describes the phenomenon where people who grow up in the same sibling position

	<p>have important common characteristics. (For example, oldest children tend to gravitate to leadership positions and youngest children often prefer to be followers.) The characteristics of the positions are complementary to one another.</p> <p>It's helpful to realize that this can also happen in a church with individuals or groups of individuals responding to issues in related ways to their familial position in the church.</p>
<p><b>Body Metaphor: Disease Process &amp; Prevention</b> (From Peter Steinke, <i>Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach</i> (2006), <i>How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems</i> (2006) and <i>Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What</i> (2006).</p>	<p>Leaders can serve as an <b>immune system</b> in the church or community. By learning to tolerate the tension of anxiety they can identify and face precipitating, external contributing conditions as well as discern the internal contributing conditions to a situation. They can learn to resist toxic influences and their carriers.</p> <p>Supporting accompanying principles:</p> <p>Wholeness is not attainable (but can be approximated).  Illness is the necessary complement to health (i.e., It's all right to be sick, feel burdened and be down)  The body has innate healing abilities.  Agents of disease are not causes of diseases (all disease processes are enabled).  Illness is biopsychosocial.  The subtle precedes the gross.  (Early detection is the best treatment.)  Everybody is different (there's no universal treatment for every organism—or congregation).</p>

	<p>A healthy circulatory system is the keystone of health and healing. (Feedback systems promote health.)</p> <p>Breathing properly is nourishing to the whole body. (The Spirit must be active.)</p> <p>The brain is the largest secreting organ of the body, the HMO of the body. (The mind converts ideas into biochemical realities.)<sup>8</sup></p> <p>Leaders can learn to move from a reactive to a prevention stance and teach others to do the same. This way they can regularly and naturally identify and repel the germs and infections caused by unhealthy attitudes and actions.</p>
<p><b>Relating in Primary Culture Ways</b> (Doug &amp; Judy Hall, <i>The Cat and the Toaster; Living System Ministry in a Technological Age</i>)</p>	<p>Ministry leaders need to remember that people were designed to relate to one another in personal, primary relationships characterized by oral communication, learning by modeling, identifying with extended family systems, and a spiritual approach to life. Leaders do well to seek to relate in this manner as much as possible, even while using technological tools from our secondary culture. (For example, practically speaking, face-to-face is better than e-mail or texting.)</p>

Figure 5-2: Systems Concepts Chart

<sup>8</sup> Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), 15-16.

### The Fruit: Inheritance and Witness

Loving God and one another go hand in hand with bearing spiritual fruit. Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit...This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples...My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you...You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last..." (John 15:5, 8, 12, 16)

Jesus also declared, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35). He prayed for all who would believe in Him in His high priestly prayer in John 17, "...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me...May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:21, 23). In these times as in all others, the church cannot afford to ignore the call of God to live in healthy, biblical community—for our own sake and for those around us who need Him so desperately. Christians in our Postmodern day and age need to more fully embrace the reality of our identity as the Body of Christ and the Family of God. Then, through bonds of unshakable commitment we may together grow more fully into the healthy, harmonious society of reconciled relationships which is God's inheritance for us. The world needs to see that the myriad of counterfeits out there cannot compare to the quality of authentic community that God designs and desires for His people.

Rather than letting conflict drive us away from genuine intimacy and *koinonia*, we should do everything we can to embrace it in its fullness. We should settle for nothing less because the present health, as well as the future of the Church depends on it as God causes His people to “shine among them like stars in the sky as [they] hold firmly to the word of life!”<sup>9</sup>

### Further Implications and Research

This study has illumined a variety issues that would warrant further investigation, research and reflection.

#### *More Intentional Communities Interviews*

There would be much benefit from interviewing more communities and individuals who have been or are involved in an intentional community. First, it would strengthen the base of research. Secondly it could lead to deeper questioning about details of intentional living which were not able to be addressed in the time available for the research in this paper. In addition, since the research was limited to those involved in evangelical intentional communities; it would be good to also interview and compare responses with those in other religious and/or secular intentional communities. The web site Community of Communities would be a good place to start (<http://www.communityofcommunities.info/>) as well as the Fellowship for Intentional Community (<http://fic.ic.org/>).

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<sup>9</sup> Philippians 2:15b-16a.

### *Roles in Conflict Engagement*

In particular it would be helpful to question people about the roles they play in working through conflict. I see five potential roles for community members in conflict:

1. The individual *offended*;
2. The one perceived to have been the *offender*;
3. The role of the *confidant(s)* of the one planning to address the other party;
4. One(s) whom would serve as *mediators* in the conflict engagement;
5. The response and/or role of those in *the community* living closely before, during and after the conflict.

It would also be helpful to research current mediator and reconciler training to better understand current approaches to helping and assist others dealing with conflict and in the various roles delineated above. There is a need for regular churchgoers to not only learn peacemaking principles from scripture in regard to interpersonal, non-assisted peacemaking, but also to help church members know how to respond when placed in various degrees of proximity to the conflict, including being one of the “assisters.” It would be good to compile a master list of organizations offering mediator and reconciliation training which could be made available to churches.



### *Children Raised in Intentional Community*

There was a great deal of interest expressed by interviewees as to the long-term effects of having been raised in intentional community. Are children raised in intentional community more socially adjusted or more able to deal with conflict than the general public? Do they have struggles or advantages unique to having been raised in intentional community? Another area of interest has to do with parenting practices in such communities. What are the unique challenges faced in a multi-adult environment for people trying to raise children? How are these dealt with and what kind of support is available for parents seeking to raise their children in these environments?

### *Further Development of the Intentionality Scale*

There has been much interest in the Intentionality Scale when presented to those both in and outside of intentional communities. Further reflection and research into other variables which might bring more depth and texture to a categorization of communities would be a good path to investigate. It would also be helpful to consider what extremes there may be on the scale and whether their manifestation in a given community would be considered healthy or unhealthy. Also, it would be fascinating to study intentional communities of the past to see where they might fall on the Intentionality Scale. Finally, it would be helpful to present the scale to those who are in the New Monastic movement to receive their feedback and reflections on the concept in order to more fully and accurately develop it. An ideal would be to offer the scale to those in intentional

communities to use as a tool to help them identify both the way in which they have their communities structured and focused as well as discuss how they would like their communities to be so oriented.

A final bit of research that could be done would be to refine or redefine the fourth quadrant of the Scale—the “Movement” communities. The term “movement” tends to be more associated with organizations characterized by a multiplication or self-reproductive focus, which does not necessarily fit with the ideas of stability and cultivation of the core community. Perhaps a better term or title could be identified.

#### *Chart of Systems Concepts for Pastoral Reference*

The offering of the above chart or list of systems concepts could indeed be helpful as a reference for pastors and ministry leaders. This list could be further enhanced by an investigation or study into these concepts or principles as taught or reflected in scripture. First, there are abundant scriptural examples of both healthy and unhealthy approaches to conflict and differences. Secondly, it is very likely that there may be systems principles or concepts taught or modeled in scripture that could be cited and added to the chart. With these identified, a third column called Scriptural Undergirdings could be added to the chart.

## APPENDIX A

**List of One Another Commands<sup>1</sup>****Accept one another**

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (Rom 15:7)

**Admonish one another**

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. (Col 3:16)

**Bear one another's burdens**

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal 6:2)

**Bear with one another**

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. (Eph 4:2)

**Build up one another**

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification (*original=build up one another*). (Rom 14:19)

**Care for one another**

. . . so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. (1 Cor 12:25)

**Comfort one another**

Therefore encourage each other (*original=comfort one another*) with these words. (1 Thess 4:18)

**Confess faults to one another**

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. (James 5:16)

**Be Devoted to one another**

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. (Rom 12:10a)

**Encourage one another**

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1 Thess 5:11)

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry Tools Resource Center, "Relating to One Another: The One Another Commands of Scripture," <http://mintools.com/bodylife4.htm> (accessed April 2, 2012).

**Fellowship with one another**

But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. (1 John 1:7)

**Forgive one another**

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Eph 4:32)

**Greet one another**

Greet one another with a holy kiss. (Rom 16:16)

**Be Honest with one another**

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices . . . (Col 3:9)

**Honor one another**

Honor one another above yourselves. (Rom 12:10b)

**Be Hospitable to one another**

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. (1 Pet 4:9)

**Be Kind to one another**

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Eph 4:32)

**Love one another**

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another . . . (Rom 13:8)

**Members one of another**

So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. (Rom 12:5)

**Pray for one another**

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. (James 5:16)

**Be of the Same Mind with one another**

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves (*original=same mind among each other*) as you follow Christ Jesus . . . (Rom 15:5)

**Serve one another**

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature ; rather, serve one another in love. (Gal 5:13)

**Spur one another on**

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. (Heb 10:24)

**Submit to one another**

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Eph 5:21)

## APPENDIX B

The Twelve Marks of New Monasticism<sup>2</sup>

1. Relocation to the "abandoned places of Empire."
2. Sharing economic resources with fellow community members and the needy among us.
3. Hospitality to the stranger.
4. Lament for racial divisions within the church and our communities combined with the active pursuit of a just reconciliation.
5. Humble submission to Christ's body, the Church.
6. Intentional formation in the way of Christ and the rule of the community along the lines of the old novitiate.
7. Nurturing common life among members of an intentional community.
8. Support for celibate singles alongside monogamous married couples and their children.
9. Geographical proximity to community members who share a common rule of life.
10. Care for the plot of God's earth given to us along with support of our local economies.
11. Peacemaking in the midst of violence and conflict resolution within communities along the lines of Matthew 18.
12. Commitment to a disciplined contemplative life.

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The New Monasticism: What it has to Say to Today's Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, Baker Publishing Group, 2008) 39.

## APPENDIX C

The Eight Thinking Systems<sup>3</sup>

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
<b>Primary Evidence Issue</b>	Physical survival	Personal safety	Physical prowess	Moral & social stability	Personal achievement & success	Intimate & sharing relationships	Flexibility & adaptability	Global survival
<b>Attitude to Life</b>	To stay alive	To live in peace	To live and control	To live faithfully	To live to your full potential	To live unselfishly	To live with versatility	To live in harmony
<b>Basic Life Assumptions</b>	Survive against all odds	Nature is controlled by spiritual forces	Survival of the fittest	Good will triumph over evil	Planned development	Share, serve & accommodate	Discern trends and adapt	Preserve the mystery of life
<b>Fundamental Security Issues</b>	Food, water, warmth	Harmony with the spiritual powers	To be stronger than adversaries	To follow the path of truth/righteousness	Outscore competition	Bonding / friends	Fore-sight	Undo destructive rivalries
<b>Fundamental Significance Issues</b>	Nourishment and survival	To be blessed and avoid curse	To win, conquer	To be faithful to the truth	Success & personal achievement	Share burdens & empower the poor	To ride the latest wave	Cosmological harmony

<sup>3</sup> Michael Armour and Don Browning, *Systems Sensitive Leadership: Empowering Diversity without Polarizing the Church* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2000), 16.

## APPENDIX D

## Rule for the Fellowship of Saint John<sup>4</sup>

### Prayer for the Society

The members of the Fellowship of Saint John and the brothers of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist are united in mutual bonds of prayer. Members promise to pray for the Society and its mission every day, commending to the love of God the brothers and those they are called to serve.

### Annual Commitment

Members reaffirm their bond with the Society and their commitment to the Rule of the Fellowship annually in writing when they receive the Director's letter.

### Reflecting on the Rule of the SSJE

Each member of the Fellowship keeps a copy of the Rule of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, and over the course of the year takes time to reflect on its teachings, using its guidance for living an ordered life of prayer and service.

### The Worshipping Community

The vocation of all Christians is to share and strengthen the common life in the Body of Christ. Each member of the Fellowship is a committed and recognized member of a worshipping community—a parish, chaplaincy or other regular congregation within the Body of Christ—and contributes to its life and ministry.

### The Eucharist

Our worship of God finds its fullest expression in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Members participate in the Holy Eucharist on a regular basis, normally every Sunday and on the major celebrations of the Christian year. Those members who belong to Christian denominations which offer fewer opportunities for Eucharistic worship take part as often as they can and are faithful to the regular worship of their community.

### The Rhythm of Feast and Fast

As far as possible, members of the Fellowship incorporate the rhythm of the Church Year into their worship and devotional life, especially the major feasts of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, and the seasons of Advent and Lent. Our feasts will be holy and joyful if we are prepared to enter from time to time into Jesus' desert fast. Fasting is appropriate on penitential occasions and at times of retreat, reflection or preparation; it is especially recommended during Advent and Lent. Those unable to fast are encouraged to take on some other appropriate discipline.

### Personal Prayer

The Holy Spirit, poured into our hearts, inspires in us prayer which embraces the whole of life and draws us into intimate communion with God. Members of the Fellowship adopt a rhythm of regular prayer. Priority is given to securing several opportunities during each week for meditative prayer in which they can open their hearts to the love of Christ and grow in intimacy with him. Four periods of half an hour, or five of twenty minutes, form a basic pattern; some members are drawn to a fuller commitment. Members are also encouraged to incorporate some form of the Daily Office into their prayer, either regularly or occasionally. In

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<sup>4</sup> Fellowship of Saint John, "The Rule for the Fellowship of Saint John," <http://www.ssje.org/fsjrule.html> (accessed April 2, 2012).



praying the Offices of Morning Prayer, Noonday Prayer, Evening Prayer or Compline members join in the round of worship offered by the brothers of the Society.

## Study

The pursuit of knowledge is an expression of love for God's world and the riches of revelation. Through regular reading and study, members develop their understanding of the Christian faith in contemporary life, deepen their knowledge of the Scriptures, and nurture their spiritual growth.

## Retreat

Times of retreat which enable us to celebrate the primacy of the love of God above all else are essential elements in the rhythm of life. All members are urged to make a three-day silent retreat at least once every year to deepen their life in Christ. 'When circumstances prevent this, a member may choose to observe several quiet days in the year, withdrawing from their usual activities for prayer, stillness, reflection and spiritual reading.

## Reconciliation

Members commit themselves to making a searching review of their life of discipleship in the light of the gospel at least twice a year, normally before Christmas and Easter. They express their repentance and experience the forgiveness of God through the rite of Reconciliation where this is available to them. Others will seek the grace of renewal through their own prayer.

## Giving

Members of the Fellowship express their gratitude for God's generosity by giving of their time, abilities and money as their life circumstances allow. In the stewardship of their resources, members take into account the needs of the Church, the poor, the Society's ministries and other concerns related to the common welfare. Members take responsibility for avoiding waste and extravagance in their lives and find ways of embodying the simplicity and generosity of Christ.

## Health

Jesus came as our healer that we "may have life and have it abundantly." Members of the Fellowship take responsibility for the maintenance of their health, both for their own sake and out of consideration for the communities in which they live. Regular exercise, diet, rest, appropriate medical attention, creative activities and play all contribute to our physical and mental well-being.

## Relationships

A living faith in the Trinity deepens our commitment to the fostering of personal relationships in which we are called to give ourselves and to be open to the gifts of others. In their daily life, members of the Fellowship seek ways to nurture the committed relationships that God has given them, devoting time and energy to their relationships with friends, members of their families, spouses or partners.

## Mission and Service

The conversion of our hearts as we seek to follow Christ and abide in his love bears fruit in mission and service. Through prayer and consultation with others, members endeavor to discern ways of using their gifts, abilities and interests in the service of others.

*As the Society acts in the Name of Christ,  
wherein the Beloved Disciple found it his joy to live,  
so should it be our endeavor to draw others  
into the fellowship of the same rove  
which is the stimulating principle of our own life.*

**Richard Meux Benson,  
Founder of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist**

## APPENDIX E

Nightingale Community CORE VALUES:<sup>5</sup>**1. EVANGELISM** for the sake of **TRUE EMPOWERMENT**

Ultimately, we desire to bring people into Jesus' kingdom. Concrete personal and community change happens when people rely on Jesus Christ. The empowerment of the Spirit of Christ is essential for long-lasting change that has eternal significance.

**2. MERCY** for the sake of **GOSPEL INTEGRITY**

We appreciate the impact of small steps. Our investment and relationships in the neighborhood help us to know when a person or family has needs that would otherwise remain unknown by churches or social services. We are responsive – deeply, creatively, and resourcefully – to the particular needs of individuals and families around us. We allow interruptions into our personal lives, such as welcoming sponsored residents into the house and mentoring them.

**3. AVAILABILITY** for the sake of **FLEXIBILITY**

We do not over-schedule ministry or our lives. We strive to keep some part of our lives open for the unexpected. In prayer, we seek to make ourselves available to God and respond to His leading.

**4. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT** for the sake of **JUSTICE**

We desire our neighborhood to be a safe, healthy place. We desire our neighbors to care for one another and to have forums to voice concerns about the neighborhood and the city. We believe this is essential, not only for us to form relationships and to gain credibility in witness for Christ, but also to call people into responsibility for each other, to empower people into places of growth, and to address injustice on a small scale.

**5. RECONCILIATION** for the sake of **WITNESS**

Jesus said that the world will know his reality by our unity. Given the cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity in the household, we are aware of the interest the neighborhood will take in us as well as the potential for conflict between us. Thus, we actively try to understand each other better and seek to resolve

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<sup>5</sup> Mako Nagasawa, "Uncovering Hidden Treasure," [http://nagasawafamily.org/urban\\_values.htm](http://nagasawafamily.org/urban_values.htm) (accessed April 2, 2012).

conflict according to biblical teaching. We do not shy away from healthy discussions.

#### **6. SIMPLICITY** for the sake of **GENEROSITY**

We are mindful of Jesus' teaching on wealth. We cheerfully allow each other respectful use of our own possessions. We also seek to be generous with the backyard and the basement, as well as to create hospitable spaces on our floors.

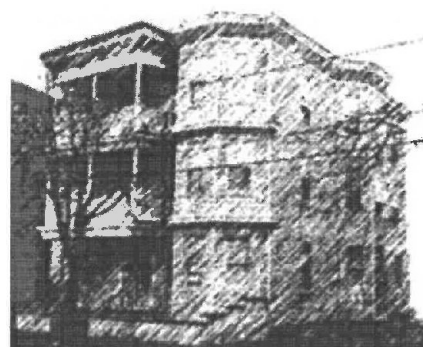
#### **7. FUN** for the sake of **REST**

Intensity can take its toll. We are aware of our need for refreshing and enjoyable times, both with each other and apart. We also value times that our sponsored residents and neighbors can enjoy us and each other.

## APPENDIX F

**Information Sheet – Mill Street House****Vision:**

Mill Street House is a place where people attending seminary, seeking an experience of spiritual formation, or in a phase of discernment in their lives, can enhance their training with a residential experience of modified intentional community in a liturgical setting. Our life is rooted in a daily worship rhythm using the *Book of Common Prayer*, though residents typically come from several different denominations.



**Community life:** We have a required all-house meal once a week. Roommates in units need to negotiate how often they wish to eat together. Living at Mill Street includes helping with general building chores (e.g. trash, snow, move-ins/outs, event clean-up.) We decide on other shared events ad hoc: sharing groceries, going on a retreat together, inviting a Christian leader to eat with us, serving the neighborhood, etc. Since hospitality is among the oldest traditions of residential Christian communities, guests are welcome and encouraged, but any stays long enough to impact the overall house need to be discussed with everyone. Our behavioral commitments to each other are expressed in a modified version of the Gordon-Conwell community life statement (appended.)

**Liturgical rhythm:** The liturgical “style” of the house tends towards the monastic, using the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*. The daily routine includes BCP Morning Prayer Monday-Friday (required as a key part of community formation) and Compline every night (participation at least 2-3x/week expected). We celebrate Eucharist either on feast days or with our meal. Adult residents are trained to play all roles in these services. We follow the liturgical calendar in both chapel and our general life (e.g. no Christmas decorations the first few weeks of Advent; house Lenten discipline, etc.). In addition to this structure, residents are welcome to organize Bible studies or prayer sessions as they feel led.

**Isaiah 58 ministry:** Scripture is clear that Jesus spent much of his time with people on society’s margins; God has called us to a neighborhood where there are many needs (but which nevertheless enjoys a much higher standard of living than the majority of the world). We hope to be leaven in the Gloucester Crossing community, listening and being good neighbors (rather than imposing an agenda or a program), loving people as Jesus would, and earning the right to be heard by joining in ordinary neighborhood life. While there are a few neighborhood events we like house members to attend, the majority of this happens informally and requires time and initiative from residents to build their own relationships with neighbors.

**Tenant-at-Will information:** Participants invited into the life of the Mill Street House will also be subletting a bedroom in one of the two unfurnished rental units from Mark Dirksen and Beth Maynard (who live permanently in the third

unit). Each apartment is approx. 1300 sq feet in a classic New England triple-decker, and accommodates 3-4 adults depending on couple/single status. You will have sole use of your room, plus access to all common areas inside and outside your unit and to the chapel. Bedrooms are rented on a tenant-at-will, month-to-month basis, with 30 days' notice required to move out.

Monthly Cost: (as of 7/1/10) Single person	\$440
Married couple	\$695
Family with children, occupying 2 bedrooms	\$880

This includes off-street parking for one car, free laundry onsite, a small amount of basement storage, and free wireless internet. It does not include either basic utilities (gas and electric), which are shared among all residents of each floor, or extras like cable TV or a landline phone, which you must arrange for yourself in your own name if you want to have.

The property is located 10-15 minutes from GCTS and Gordon College, in Gloucester Crossing in Beverly, a neighborhood with lots of subsidized rental housing which has little in common with the idyllic suburban environment only 5 minutes away, and where street life can be noisy. Expect the unexpected. Please be aware of this in making your choices about living here.

**Other things to know:** Mill Street House is geared towards people who are looking for a spiritually formational housing situation on a short-term basis (say 1-3 years). It is a place to sample community living, not a permanent residence.

This house is a personal home as well as a place for community life; please be aware that your behavior can impact Beth and Mark's long-term relationships with the neighborhood.

We honor both the local church and the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. We choose connection and accountability to our local churches and denominations of which we may be a part.

**Who are you guys?** Beth and Mark are a middle-aged couple who are trying to follow Jesus and believe doing it with other people is a good idea. Beth has been an Episcopal priest for 15 years, is an adjunct at Gordon-Conwell, and has also worked in publishing and at a homeless shelter; Mark is a real estate agent with long experience in church administration, liturgical music and lay ministry. Please ask any questions you may have of us.

**For further information: Mark Dirksen/Beth Maynard, 978-927-0365, [bmaynard@gmail.com](mailto:bmaynard@gmail.com)**

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### **Mill Street House Community Life Statement**

*(a very slightly modified version of the GCTS Community Life Statement)*

- We affirm that the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the ultimate guide for our values, attitudes and behaviors in all relationships.
- We will seek to foster the development of spiritual maturity through maintaining a personal devotional life and through participating in community worship and prayer.
- We will seek to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace, and in gentleness, patience and humility, accept one another in love.
- We will seek to encourage one another to mature in Christ-likeness through attempting to speak the truth in love.
- We will seek to encourage unity in families through responsible relationships.
- We will seek to respect and encourage our uniqueness in Christ, which includes our diversity of denomination, race, culture, personality, experience, gifts and goals.
- We will seek to become involved individually and corporately with the Church in ministering to spiritual and social needs within and beyond our own community.
- We renounce attitudes such as greed, jealousy, false pride, lust, bitterness, hostility, an unforgiving spirit, and prejudice such as that based on race, sex and academic or socio-economic status.
- We renounce behaviors such as distortion of God's Word, deception, falsehood, drunkenness, stealing, and sexual immorality such as premarital intercourse, adultery and homosexual behavior.
- We believe where conflict or sin occurs in our community, a biblical process such as stated in Matthew 18:15-20 should be followed to seek correction, forgiveness, restitution and reconciliation.
- We will seek to practice an attitude of mutual submission according to the mind of Christ, recognizing that at times our personal rights and preferences must be put aside for the sake of others' conscience and the good of the community.

- We will seek to encourage the cultivation of such spiritual attitudes as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.



## APPENDIX G

**THE PEACEMAKER'S PLEDGE<sup>6</sup>***A Commitment to Biblical Conflict Resolution*

As people reconciled to God by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we believe that we are called to respond to conflict in a way that is remarkably different from the way the world deals with conflict (Matt. 5:9; Lk. 6:27-36; Gal. 5:19-26). We also believe that conflict provides opportunities to glorify God, serve other people, and grow to be like Christ (Rom. 8:28-29; 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1; Jas. 1:2-4). Therefore, in response to God's love and in reliance on His grace, we commit ourselves to responding to conflict according to the following principles.

By God's grace, we will apply these principles as a matter of stewardship, realizing that conflict is an opportunity, not an accident. We will remember that success in God's eyes is not a matter of specific results, but a faithful, dependent obedience. And we will pray that our service as peacemakers will bring praise to our Lord and lead others to know His infinite love (Matt. 25:14-21; John 13:34-35; Rom. 12:18; 1 Peter 2:19; 4:19).

*The Four G's of Peacemaking:*

## 1. Glorify God.

Instead of focusing on our own desires or dwelling on what others may do, we will rejoice in the Lord and bring Him praise by depending on His forgiveness, wisdom, power and love, as we seek to faithfully obey His commands and maintain a loving, merciful, and forgiving attitude (Ps. 37:1-6; Mark 11:25; John 14:15; Romans 12:17-21; 1 Cor. 10:31; Phil. 4:2-9; Col. 3:1-4; Jas. 3:17-18; 4:1-3; 1 Peter 2:12).

## 2. Get the Log Out of Your Eye

Instead of blaming others for a conflict or resisting correction, we will trust in God's mercy and take responsibility for our own contribution to conflicts—confessing our sins to those we have wronged, asking God to help us change any attitudes and habits that lead to conflict, and seeking to repair any harm we have caused (Prov. 28:13; Matt. 7:3-5; Luke 19:8; Col. 3:5-14; 1 John 1:8-9).

## 3. Gently Restore

Instead of pretending that conflict doesn't exist or talking about others behind their backs, we will overlook minor offenses or we will talk personally and

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<sup>6</sup> Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004) 259-261.

graciously with those whose offenses seem too serious to overlook, seeking to restore them rather than condemn them. When a conflict with a Christian brother or sister cannot be resolved in private, we will ask others in the Body of Christ to help us settle the matter in a biblical manner (Prov. 19:11; Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 6:1-8; Gal. 6:1-2; Eph. 4:29; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; Jas. 5:9).

#### 4. Go and be Reconciled.

Instead of accepting premature compromise or allowing relationships to wither, we will actively pursue genuine peace and reconciliation—forgiving others as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us, and seeking just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences (Matt. 5:23-24; 6:12; 7:12; Eph. 4:1-3, 32; Phil. 2:3-4).

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